ALFRED

HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

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June 1974

Dear Reader:

There is a bizarre marriage of mystery and suspense this month that is enough to discourage any June bride, not to mention her groom. Yet how many persons heed wise counsel? I suppose, too, that any given issue of this magazine is read even on someone's honeymoon. After all, it is difficult to find more action anywhere.

I trust, however, that no bride will really be alarmed over the strange marriages and singular divorces herein, for this is the day of sexual equality and women's lib. She will see that opportunity exists for both sexes—in these pages, at least. Who-does-it could be Eitherperson.

If you happen to read a copy of this magazine on the longest day of the year, I suggest that my authors will make it seem the shortest. From Frank Sisk with *Capricorn Descending* to Stephen Wasylyk with the novelette titled *Dead End*, they all have a knack for terminating those interminable hours.

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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Never let it be said that there's nothing new under the stars.

Capricorn Descending



Miss Lulu Franklin wished to confide in the proper police authority about a matter of life and death. She finally reached Captain Thomas McFate's stark office via a desk sergeant, a first-grade detective, a detective sergeant and a detective lieutenant named Bergeron. During this progress

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through channels Miss Lulu Franklin steadfastly refused to divulge specifics.

She was sitting now, plump and determined, in a metal chair beside a cluttered metal desk presided over by McFate.

"What's it all about?" he asked Bergeron.

"A matter of life and death, Skipper. That's all she's told us so far."

McFate gave the woman a look of inquiry; another middle-aged spinster suffering from high heat and humidity. "All right, Miss Franklin. I'm listening."

Obviously flustered by that flat tone of voice, nevertheless she asked, "How may I be certain that you are the topmost authority for this sort of matter, sir?"

Bergeron grinned and cut it off.

McFate sat straighter in his chair and said, "This happens to be the homicide division. We deal with matters of life and death on a daily basis. I'm the commander of this division. Is that enough? Or would you prefer to see the commissioner or the mayor?"

"I'm satisfied," she said.

by Frank Sisk

"All right then, Miss Franklin. Let's hear your story."

"A very dear friend of mine has been kidnapped," she began. "I saw the ransom note only a few hours ago. Ernest showed it to me in strict confidence. He made me promise not to tell anyone, certainly not the police. The least little leak might endanger Bertha's life. But after thinking it over—"

"Just a minute, Miss Franklin," McFate said. "Let's note down a few facts as we go along." He placed a yellow pad on the desk and took a pen from its holder. "You say somebody's been kidnapped. Who is it?"

"Why, Bertha Blague, of course. I hope none of this will get into the newspapers, sir."

"Blague? How is it spelled?"

"B, L, A— But her name is actually Gager now. I keep forgetting. She and Ernest have been married such a short time."

"How short a time?"

"It will be two months tomorrow."

"Where do they live?"

"On Winterset Road. Number thirty-seven."

McFate replaced the pen in the holder and sat back. "I believe you said that Ernest Gager showed you a ransom note earlier this morning. Tell me about it."

"He phoned me while I was

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having breakfast and asked me to come over right away."

"Do you live near the Gagers, Miss Franklin?"

"I have an apartment a few blocks away."

"The address please."

"The Torrington Arms. It's on Talbert Avenue."

"Have you lived there long?"

"For ten years, at least. As a matter of fact, I own it."

McFate didn't bat an eye. "Go on. What did you do when Ernest Gager interrupted your breakfast?"

"I walked as quickly as possible over to Winterset Road, a matter of five minutes."

"You don't own a car, Miss Franklin?"

"Of course I do. But I'd let Bertha borrow it yesterday."

"I see. Don't the Gagers own a car?"

"Bertha has a Volvo, but last night Ernest was using it to attend a meeting of the County Astrological Society over in Taylortown. Bertha and I would normally have been there too. However, I had a relative coming for dinner and Bertha simply insisted on going to a movie at Cinema Two, the one in Millbrook."

"Insisted?"

"An old school friend of hers had a big part in this movie. Shelley Winters."

McFate again failed to bat an eye. "Yes?"

"So I let her borrow the Humber."

"Your car's a Humber?"

"That's right. Bertha drove off in it at six last night and we haven't seen her since."

"What color is it?"

"Humbers, I believe, are always black. Anyway, mine is."

"What's the plate number?"

"I never remember things like that."

"We'll find it." McFate turned to Bergeron. "Get the number from Motor Vehicles, Lieutenant, and pass it on to Traffic as a priority."

"That sounds quite efficient," Miss Franklin said.

"Thank you, ma'am," McFate said. "Now fill me in on the rest of it. You arrive at the Gagers'. What does he have to tell you?"

"He said he got home from the meeting shortly before eleven. Bertha was not in yet. Ernest thought this a bit unusual because she had planned to see the first showing of the movie and that's usually over by nine o'clock. He made himself a drink. The drink made him sleepy. He undressed and went to bed with a book. He told me he fully intended to stay

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awake until Bertha returned but he fell asleep.

"When he woke it was morning and the bedside lamp was still burning. The twin bed next to his was made up and empty. He looked at the radio alarm. The time was five after eight. He says he was quite worried by then. He went downstairs and looked around. No Bertha, no sign that she'd been in and out. He went to the front door to get the morning paper. He says he was beginning to tell himself that Bertha had probably stayed overnight with me after bringing back the Humber.

"Then, under the morning paper, he found a plain white envelope. It contained the ransom note. Unsigned, of course."

"Of course," McFate said, lips tightening over an incipient smile. "And that's when he called you."

"That's right."

McFate could not seriously regard Miss Franklin, plump, prim and fortyish, as part of a ménage à trois, but it did seem to him that she was inordinately close to a couple who were still practically newlyweds.

"How long have you known Bertha Gager?" he asked.

"Ten years at least."

"And her husband?"

"Not long in a temporal way. Six or seven months, probably."

"How did your friend happen to meet him?"

"We both met him at the same time. At a meeting of the Astrological Society. I remember when we met, the moon was ascendant. That's seven months ago. I'm Aries and rather restless at that time. Bertha's Leo, which makes it a passionate time for her where the heart's concerned. And Ernest, being Capricorn, was entering a sluggish period."

McFate listened with a deepening scowl. Finally he interrupted a recondite reference to "benefics" and "glyphs" to ask: "Do you happen to have a photograph of Bertha Gager?"

"Will a snapshot do?"

"If that's all you've got."

Miss Franklin plunged a hand into her voluminous leather bag and came up with a thick wallet. She fingered through several layers of plastic envelopes, finally extracting a snapshot.

McFate studied it for ten silent seconds. Bertha Gager in four colors looked like an unfulfilled Shelley Winters—sad brown eyes, down-turning mouth. If she had ever been passionate under the ascendant moon it didn't show here.

"She's a few pounds thinner now," Miss Franklin said. "If that's any help."

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"Everything helps in a kidnap investigation."

"Will you have to call in the Federal authorities?"

"Not yet. Not until we check out a few things ourselves. I'll be glad to give you a lift home on my way to the Gagers' place."

"Thanks just the same," Miss Franklin said. "I'd prefer to take a taxi."

Twenty minutes later, Detective Sergeant Louis Castonous parked the unmarked police car at the curb in front of 37 Winterset Road. The house was a pale-yellow duplex. The Gagers occupied the right half. Between the dual sidewalks leading to each entrance was a scorched strip of lawn approximately 12 by 15 feet. At the house next door, a somewhat similar duplex, a rotary mower was whirling protectively over a greener patch. The neighborhood was not the class that would normally attract kidnappers.

Climbing from the police car with a growing sense of skepticism, McFate walked to the entrance of 37, closely followed by Castonous. He pressed a pearly button below the brass numerals.

Almost instantly a man opened the door.

"Are you Mr. Gager?" McFate asked.

"That's right. Who are you?"

McFate answered by flopping open the worn leather case in which he carried the gold captain's badge.

"The police. Oh, heavens!"

"May we come in?" McFate said.

"I suppose so. Harm's done now. I swore Lulu to secrecy. That's a woman for you."

Gager was tall and thin. His blondish hair (possibly bleached, McFate thought) was worn in chin-length sideburns. He appeared to be in his early thirties, which made him considerably younger than his missing wife, and he was rather handsome in a theatrical way.

"If what Miss Franklin told us is true," McFate said, "she did you a favor in coming to us. Kidnapping is often fatal."

"I know, I know." Gager took a cigarette from a pack in his shirt pocket and tapped it on a thumbnail. "I'm at wit's end, Captain. I really am."

"Miss Franklin mentioned a note."

"Yes, indeed." Gager flourished a silver lighter and lit the cigarette. "Let me show it to you."

"That's what we're here for."

Gager took an envelope from the pocket of his slacks and handed it to McFate.

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McFate glanced briefly at the envelope and then extracted a folded sheet of typewriting paper. The message, in block capitals, was written in pencil:

WE HAVE YOUR WIFE. YOU WILL HEAR FROM US SOON. IF YOU FAITHFULLY FOLLOW OUR DIRECTIONS YOU WILL HAVE HER BACK TONIGHT. DO NOT NOTIFY AUTHORITIES IF YOU VALUE YOUR WIFE'S LIFE. STAY NEAR PHONE THIS MORNING.

McFate felt that there was something patently phony about the message. He had the same feeling about Gager's dramatic behavior.

"I'll keep this," he said, thrusting envelope and paper into his pocket. "Have you received the phone call yet?"

"Just a few minutes before your arrival," Gager said. "In fact, I was preparing to leave when you rang the bell."

"Where were you going?"

"To the bank."

"What were your instructions?"

"Do I have to tell you?"

"I think you'd better."

"Well, I was told to collect twenty-five thousand dollars."

"By whom?"

"How should I know? A voice on the phone."

"Male or female?"

"Male. Definitely male. Rather hoarse."

"Are you able to put your hands on twenty-five thousand?"

"Just about. Bertha and I have a joint savings account and it presently contains twenty-five thousand and sixty-two dollars."

"Quite a coincidence," McFate said.

"That's exactly what I've been telling myself."

"You sure you didn't recognize the voice on the phone?"

"Positively."

"All right. What else were you told?"

"The currency should be tens and twenties. Used bills. The serial numbers are not to be recorded."

McFate nodded.

"I am to pack the money in a brown briefcase," Gager continued, "and take it to Union Station. There I am to place the case in a locker and then mail the key to a given address."

"What's the address?"

Taking a small slip of paper from his shirt pocket, Gager read, "Eleven oh four Windward Avenue."

"Any name?"

"Just the address."

"You realize, I imagine, that if you mail that locker key this afternoon it won't arrive at that address until tomorrow morning."

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"Come to think of it, yes, you're right. And that means—"

"It means you can bet your boots your wife won't be released tonight, as promised in the message you've given me."

"Of course, of course."

McFate again received an impression of something phony about the case. "What bank are you off to?" he finally asked.

"The Merchants Guaranty."

"Main office?"

"Yes. I suppose you'll have me under constant surveillance?"

"Not so you could notice it, Mr. Gager."

Back in the police car, McFate got Bergeron on the radio and gave him a comprehensive description of Ernest Gager. "He's on the way to the Merchants Guaranty on State Street. Allegedly to get twenty-five thousand in ransom money. Get a detective over there right away—Haggerty, if he's on duty—and tell him to keep on Gager's tail until the briefcase is disposed of."

"Done," Bergeron said.

McFate looked at Castonous. "All right, Sergeant. Let's take a spin out to Windward Avenue. I'm kind of curious about that address Gager gave us."

Arriving at the 300 block of Windward Avenue in twelve minutes, they began to run its length. McFate was not really surprised to find that 1104 was a vacant lot between two old red-brick buildings.

"Who's conning who, Captain?" Castonous asked.

"We'll find out soon enough, Sergeant."

"That Gager guy struck me more as one who takes than gets taken."

"That was my impression too."

"Where to now? Back to headquarters?"

"I think so. And when we get there, Sergeant, I want you to phone George Appleton in the tax assessor's office and find out who owns this vacant lot."

"Will do, Skipper."

The missing Humber had been found by the time McFate returned to his office.

"Traffic discovered it in the very first place they checked," Bergeron said.

"Cinema Two in Millbrook?"

"On the nose, Skipper. All by its lonesome in the parking lot."

"What else did they report?"

"The car was unlocked. An open pack of cigarettes was on the front seat. The ignition key was missing. That's about the extent of it."

"Have we got the car inside now?"

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"Oh, yes. It was towed in about twenty minutes ago. Our men are going over it now."

McFate was hardly settled at his desk when Castonous appeared in the doorway.

"That vacant lot," he said, "is owned by a woman named Lulu Franklin."

McFate almost smiled. "That's more like it, Sergeant. Thank you."

"You're welcome, sir," Castonous said, a look of puzzlement on his face.

Still on the verge of smiling, McFate took from his coat pocket the printed note he had acquired from Gager and read it again: DO NOT NOTIFY AUTHORITIES. That was what had stuck in his craw from the beginning, that word AUTHORITIES. Not fuzz, not police, not cops, not pigs. *Authorities!* That was Miss Franklin's term, and now as he reread the message he could detect her fine female hand in another phrase: FAITHFULLY FOLLOW OUR DIRECTIONS. Finally, there was the amateurish fumble of promising one thing—YOU WILL HAVE HER BACK TONIGHT—and then negating it in a subsequent phone call which stipulated a pattern of action which ran into the next day.

Rank amateurism, McFate reflected. Then he thought of the male voice (*rather hoarse*, according to Gager) which had delivered the phone message about stashing a briefcase full of money in a locker and mailing the key to an address that was a vacant lot, and he wondered: *Is there some method in this lunacy that escapes me? And who in hell is Miss Franklin's hoarse-voiced collaborator? And why should Miss Franklin, apparently a woman of considerable means, wish to shake $25,000 out of her best friend's bank account that was now held jointly with her husband?*

McFate reached for the phone and told the switchboard operator to connect him with the main office of the Merchants Guaranty.

"And while I'm on the phone there," he added, "look up the number of Lulu Franklin on Talbert Avenue. I'll want to talk to her next."

The bank's switchboard came on presently and McFate asked to speak with a vice-president, any vice-president, and was put through to a soft-voiced man who answered the phone by identifying himself.

"Raymond Emory here."

McFate identified himself in turn and stated that he wanted information concerning an account held jointly by Bertha and Ernest

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Gager. Emory said he would be happy to oblige once he was certain it was really the police department on the line.

"Call me back," McFate said. "Here's the number."

"Permit me to look up the number in the directory, sir," Emory said with utmost politeness.

"Suit yourself." These bankers, McFate mused, reminded him of the boys in the bunco squad—loaded with suspicion.

Emory was back with him in short order. McFate briefly outlined what he wanted. Emory excused himself and went off to consult records. He returned within a few minutes.

"Originally," he said, "this savings account was held solely by Bertha Blague. Two months ago it was converted to a joint-survivors account under the names of Bertha Gager and Ernest Gager. By the way, Captain, as of today this account has been nearly wiped out by a massive withdrawal. Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"We expected that. What was in the account, Mr. Emory, when it was held solely by Bertha Blague?"

"Thirteen thousand dollars."

"And when it became a joint account what amount was deposited?"

"Let's see. Mr. Gager paid in by treasurer's check drawn on a Baltimore bank the exact amount of eleven thousand, nine hundred and seventy-eight dollars. With interest, the total today, before this large withdrawal, was twenty-five thousand and seventy-one and thirty-four cents. Balance: seventy-one dollars and thirty-four cents. We compound daily at five per cent. Any other questions, Captain?"

"That's it, Mr. Emory. Many thanks."

Hanging up, McFate began to make a few notes when the phone rang again. It was the eager-beaver switchboard operator, a female recruit, asking if she should try Miss Franklin now.

"First, let me speak to Lieutenant Bergeron."

When Bergeron came on, McFate said, "This kidnap caper is striking dim chords of memory, Bill, particularly the part concerning joint bank accounts."

"I've been getting the same vibes, Tom. Castonous has been filling me in. Once he mentioned that Gager was taking the ransom money from an account he holds jointly with his wife, I began to get a glimmer of something. Anyway, I've dug up the roundup summaries under the kidnap category for the last few years and

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I'm starting to flip through them."

"Good. It's just what I was going to suggest. The Baltimore area might offer something. Gager apparently did some banking there a few months ago."

"I'm on it. As soon as I— Just a second, Skipper. The switchboard has another call for me." Bergeron's voice faded, then came back on. "Somebody giving me the message verbally. It's Haggerty reporting in. Do you want me to take him?"

"Have the operator put him on my line, Bill. I'll get back to you later."

McFate clicked the instrument twice with his middle finger and waited for Haggerty's voice.

". . . from Union Station and he's—"

"I'm on the line now," McFate said. "Are you calling from Union Station?"

"That you, Captain?"

"That's right, Haggerty. What have you got?"

"Well, I make this gent Gager at the Merchants Guaranty on Main. He withdraws a bundle. It's delivered to him in a private office. He comes out carrying a brown briefcase. He gets into a blue Volvo and drives to a duplex on Winterset. He lets himself in with a key. I guess he lives there."

"He does," McFate told him.

"In about ten minutes he comes out again, still carrying the brown briefcase. He drives the Volvo to Union Station. He puts the briefcase in locker number one three one—one thirty-one. He takes the key to the postal substation they have here and buys a stamped envelope. He drops the locker key in the envelope and seals it. Then he deposits the envelope in a mailbox. After that he leaves. About three, four minutes ago."

"Good work, Haggerty. Now, here's what I want you to do. Check with the post office as to when mail is delivered tomorrow morning in the vicinity of the eleven-hundred block of Windward Avenue. At that time I want you loitering in front of eleven oh four. It's a vacant lot. That's where the envelope just mailed by Gager is going to end up. If nobody else is there to claim it, then it's all yours."

"What if somebody does claim it, Captain?"

"Stick like glue."

McFate cut the connection, still keeping the receiver to his ear, and clicked twice for the operator. When she acknowledged the signal he said, "You may get me Miss Franklin now."

It was just 3:33 p.m.

"Good afternoon." It was Miss

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Franklin's rather fluty voice.

"Good afternoon, ma'am. This is Captain McFate."

"I hope you have something pleasant to tell me, Captain. My horoscope indicates a ray of hope."

"Well, we've found your car."

"How wonderful! Where is it?"

"In the police garage here."

"May I pick it up? I'm simply lost without it."

"If you have an extra set of keys."

"I have several sets. Were there any clues as to what might have happened to Bertha? Signs of struggle? Anything like that?"

"Not a sign. Do you smoke, Miss Franklin?"

"No, I've never formed the habit."

"How about Bertha Gager?"

"Yes, Bertha does smoke. It's always been a minor source of dispute between us. But with Capricorn descending soon she has every expectation of quitting the habit."

"I see. One more thing, Miss Franklin. I believe you said you entertained a dinner guest last night."

"I did."

"Was it a man?" McFate had a hoarse voice in mind.

"Oh, Captain, you flatter me. No, it was a woman."

"Do you mind giving me the name?"

"Not really. But is such information actually essential to your investigation, Captain?"

"We try not to overlook anything, Miss Franklin."

"My dinner guest was a cousin. Her name is Alice Gilday."

"Is she there now?"

"I'm afraid not. She departed early this morning."

"Before you got that call from Gager?"

"An hour before that. She was on her way to Boston, in a hurry, and said she'd have breakfast en route."

"Where does she make her home?"

"Oh, really! But if you must know, Alice Gilday lives in Delaware. Stanton, Delaware. Just outside Wilmington."

"Much obliged, Miss Franklin. Your car will be ready when you are."

Bergeron came into McFate's office later, a sheaf of blue flimsies in hand.

"I've uncovered three instances in which ransom money came from a joint bank account," he said, "and in each instance the kidnapped person was the spouse."

"Aha," McFate said, grinning.

"But they all differ from the

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Gager business in one important aspect," Bergeron said. "The kidnapped person was always the husband. It was the wife who forked over the ransom."

"I'm listening."

"Another difference. In none of these cases was the kidnapping reported to the police until a few days *after* the ransom was paid. Then when the kidnapped husband failed to come home, the wife told her story."

"And nobody ever found the body."

"That's how it shapes up."

"Any descriptions of the missing man?"

"Now we have a similarity. In each case the kidnapped husband is described as—" Bergeron consulted the flimsies, "—as tall and thin with black hair, tall and thin with red hair or tall and thin with brown hair."

"Or tall and thin with blond hair," McFate said, still grinning. "I *thought* he was bleaching it."

"Gager?"

"Who else? What names was he using when he pulled these swindles?"

Bergeron checked the flimsies again. "The kidnapped husband in Portland, Maine, was Everett Green. Avocation, astrology." Bergeron was grinning now. "The kidnapped husband in Chillicothe, Ohio, was Edward Gaines. Also star-struck, according to the bereaved Mrs. Gaines, who met him at a gathering of astrological buffs. Let's see—" Bergeron ran an eye over several flimsies,"—the next summary is from Wilmington, Delaware, and it deals with a Stanton resident—"

"Named Gilday," McFate said, triumphantly slapping his hand on the desk.

"Edgar Gilday." Bergeron looked wonderingly at McFate. "How'd you know that, boss?"

"Maybe it's written in the stars. Now, before you leave for the day, Bill, I want you to assign a man to Gager for a while. The next twenty-four hours anyway."

"Will do." Bergeron folded the flimsies. "E. G. Always the same initials. What goes with these con artists?"

"Gager happens to wear a gold-and-ebony signet ring with those initials. It might indicate he's a sentimentalist."

"He's changed his angle this time, though. What's he getting at, Skipper?"

"I'm going home to sleep on it," McFate said.

The next morning, the Gager case was the first item of business to greet McFate as he strode through Homicide's central room on the way to his office.

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Detective Sergeant Castonous accosted him. "Jack Simmons left you a message, Captain."

"What about?"

"He had the night watch on that Gager guy. He says last night, a few minutes after ten, a black car of foreign make drove up in front of Gager's house and a dumpy dame got out. These are Jack's exact words."

"I can believe it."

"She goes up to the door and rings the bell. Gager lets her in. But she stays less than five minutes. When she comes out she's carrying one of these string-handled shopping bags. It looks full of something not too heavy."

"Money," McFate said with an air of satisfaction.

"You think so, Skipper?"

"I'd bet my badge on it. What else did Simmons have to say?"

"That's about it. After the dame drove off, the lights went out and Gager apparently went to bed. He was still inside when Jack's relief arrived this morning."

"Fine, fine."

Two hours later there was a phone call from Detective Haggerty. He said he was in a booth at the corner of Chestnut Street and Windward Avenue.

"How's the mail delivery there?" McFate asked.

"Right on schedule, Captain. Nobody was waiting for that envelope but me."

"And do you have it?"

"I do—after convincing the postman that I'd mailed it to myself as a gag. He thought I was crazy."

"Well, wait where you are, man. I'll come out to pick you up."

McFate and Haggerty entered Union Station at 10:25 and went directly to the row of gunmetal lockers which contained the one numbered 131. McFate inserted a key in the lock and swung open the door. Inside was the bulging brown briefcase. He lifted it out.

"Twenty-five grand doesn't seem to weigh much," Haggerty said.

"Not unless it's in nickels and dimes," McFate said. "Let's go back to the car. We'll need a screwdriver to break this lock."

McFate broke the lock in less than a minute. Pulling back the case's flap, he exposed four rolled copies of the local newspaper. Haggerty's honest face fell a couple of inches. He looked wide-eyed at his boss where a satisfied smile was playing at the corners of his mouth.

"What happened to the dough he took from the bank?" Haggerty asked. "I mean, I saw the teller

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counting it out and I saw Gager packing it inside there."

"And after that he went home, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

"That's when he replaced the dough with this bunch of newsprint, Haggerty."

"Yeah, but what the hell is it all about, Skipper?"

"Let's drive over to the Torrington Arms on Talbert Avenue and find out."

The lobby of the Torrington Arms was equipped with closed-circuit television. As a result, Miss Lulu Franklin, watching from her third-floor apartment, immediately recognized one of her visitors.

"Why, Captain McFate, what brings you here?" she asked in a genuinely surprised voice.

"A development in the Gager kidnapping, ma'am. We'd like to come up for a chat."

"Well, I'm rather dishabille."

"This concerns the welfare of your dear friend Bertha," McFate said with a trace of irony.

"All right, then, but you gentlemen must overlook my appearance."

The lobby door began to click.

Miss Franklin, wearing a frothy pink peignoir and a fresh smear of lipstick, opened the door of Apartment 30 and ushered them inside. The livingroom into which she led them was large and filled with sun from a wide window that came nearly to the floor. The furnishings were feminine pastels—pinks and blues. The walls were oyster-white.

"Please be seated if you wish," Miss Franklin said.

McFate sat gingerly on a tufted chair near a shell-white butcher-block table. Haggerty found a place on the edge of a pale-blue ottoman.

Taking a chair diagonally across from McFate, Miss Franklin said, "Don't tell me you've found a clue to Bertha's whereabouts, Captain."

"That's exactly what I'm going to tell you," McFate said. On the table in front of him was a blue-crystal vase full of cornflowers and irises. It seemed to fascinate him.

"Don't keep me in suspense," Miss Franklin said.

"I don't intend to." It wasn't the vase of posies that McFate found fascinating but the open cigarette package beside it. "Bertha Gager is right here. Now don't you keep me in suspense either, Miss Franklin. Already you've taken up too much of my time."

The woman's red lips parted, came together, parted. Finally she said, "I don't believe I follow you,

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Captain. What are you implying?"

"Well, I've been following you, my lady." McFate reached for the cigarette package and held it up. "And now I'm ready to hear your explanation."

Miss Franklin stared at the package. "She probably left those here days ago."

"That won't do at all, Miss Franklin. Like you, I don't smoke either. As a result, I have a very keen nose and my nose tells me that somebody was smoking in this room less than five minutes ago. So produce her so that I can find out how many laws you've broken with your little hoax."

Miss Franklin gasped. "I hope we have not broken any laws, Captain. It certainly wasn't our intention. All we wanted to do was to teach a scoundrel a good lesson."

At that moment Bertha Gager, looking thinner than she was when the snapshot had been taken but not a whit more attractive, entered the room and came to stand behind Lulu Franklin's chair.

"We'd better tell them the whole truth," she said in a weary voice. "Embarrassing as it is."

The whole truth, as told interchangeably by the two women during the next half hour, was that Bertha Blague had married Ernest Gager in blind faith. Innate vanity never permitted her to question why a good-looking man, years younger than herself, should choose her from so many prettier prospects. She was simply thankful that her spinsterhood had come magically to an end.

Not so guileless was her friend Lulu Franklin. Almost from the beginning she suspected money was the motive—money which Bertha had saved faithfully over the years from her job as an insurance executive's secretary—but Lulu held her tongue until Bertha mentioned the joint bank account. Even then, before speaking up, Lulu did a bit of private research. Wasn't it the joint-bank-account ploy which had deprived her cousin Alice Gilday née Hacker of her life savings? Hadn't Alice Hacker, homely as a picket fence, been swept off her feet by a good-looking young man she had met at a meeting of her astrological club? And wasn't this young man a Capricorn? And hadn't he, after just three months of marriage, been kidnapped? And hadn't poor stupid Alice stripped their joint bank account of $30,000—$20,000 of which was actually her own savings—in order to deliver a ransom to a locker in a bus depot, leaving the key to be called for at a newsstand?

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Kidnapped, my eye, Lulu Franklin had always told herself. This hustling gent has quite a racket going for him.

"So you got your cousin to come up from Delaware to finger Gager," McFate said. "Is that it?"

"If 'finger' is police parlance for identify, yes," Miss Franklin said. "Alice visited me two weeks ago and I showed her a couple of pictures I'd taken at the wedding. She identified Ernest Gager as the man who had married her under the name of Edgar Gilday."

"So then you worked out this scheme to hoax the hoaxer."

"We considered it a form of poetic justice, Captain."

"Maybe it is, ma'am. But how did you get him to sit still for it?"

"First of all, he never knew what we were up to until yesterday morning, just an hour before I called on you, and then we notified him by phone how he was to react to the spurious kidnapping of his wife. We told him we were going to report the affair as an actual kidnapping to the police. Hence, he would be under constant surveillance. Any false move and we would, as I believe the saying goes, lower the boom. As a clincher, we put Alice on the phone. She was visiting me again, as you know. And this seemed to render Ernest or Edgar, or whatever his real name is, more than pliable."

"Did you tell him you'd let him go free if he complied?"

"Yes. But of course we were lying."

"How long is he supposed to stay put?"

"Until midnight tonight."

"And I suppose a few hours before midnight you planned to tip off us dumb cops."

"That was our intention," Miss Franklin said.

"By an anonymous phone call. Right?"

"Well, yes."

McFate got to his feet. "As much as I deplore your crazy methods, ladies, I believe you have struck a powerful blow for the sisterhood."

"Thank you," Miss Franklin said.

"Thank you," said Bertha Gager née Blague.

"I'll want both of you down at headquarters right after lunch."

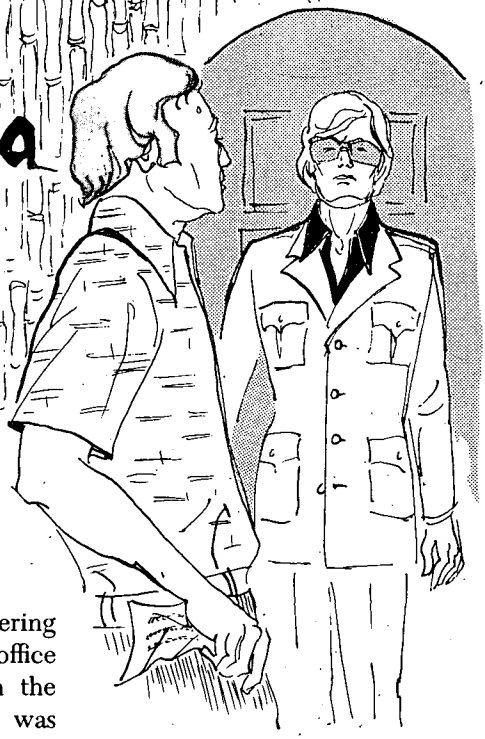
"What for?" the ladies asked in unison.

"To identify Capricorn positively as we book him."

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An educated guess, enhanced by deception, may well serve as a lever to entrapment.

The Zamboanga Shuttle



When Ferdinand Taal, peering through the peephole in his office wall, saw that the man with the white hair and dark glasses was eating dinner again on the Mayot terrace, he decided to send for Delia.

Delia pushed open the door from the open-air bar ten minutes later. Taal felt his pulses quicken a little, as always, at sight of her. The Macao-born daughter of a

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Chinese prostitute and a Portuguese sailor, she was an amazon, four inches taller than he, yet he had never known a more beautiful woman. She was the singing star of his modest floor show at the Mayot Club in Zamboanga, and Taal intended to marry her when he found the time for it. Meanwhile their present arrangement was quite satisfactory.

Delia found Taal sitting behind his desk, nervously tapping his fingers on a newspaper before him. He said to her, "Who is the white-haired man with dark glasses? You've had a drink with him between shows last night and tonight. And now he's having dinner on the terrace."

She shrugged her bare shoulders. "A stranger to me, Ferdinand. A tourist. He's polite and quiet and has an interesting way of talking."

"Do you know his name?"

"Lorenzo Valdez," she said.

"From around here?"

"I don't know. Why?"

Taal frowned. "Has he tried to . . . to make up to you . . . to . . . ?" He floundered.

by James Holding

Delia laughed. "Of course he has, *montecato*. I would be insulted if he did not. And so would you be, *querido*! Nothing serious, however. I promise you that."

"What do you talk about when you drink together?"

Her expression was mischievous. "He tells me he likes to hear me sing. And how beautiful I am."

Strangely, this did not seem to fuel Taal's ready jealousy. "Oh?" he said.

"I'm joking," she said. "Señor Valdez also likes our *sinegang* very much. The best fish soup he has ever eaten, he tells me."

Taal said, as though reluctant to ask, "Has he mentioned Hong Kong to you, Delia?"

"Hong Kong? Yes, several times, I think. But why not? Hong Kong is a big city, fascinating, not far away. We have both been there . . ."

"I don't want a geography lesson, Delia. Do you think Señor Valdez could come from Hong Kong?"

She made an expressive gesture with her slender hands. "I don't know," she said, a little crestfallen. "He could, I suppose."

Taal returned to the subject she had thought abandoned. "These . . . propositions he makes to you. What did he offer you?"

"Nothing. He didn't get a

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chance. I simply assured him that I'm private property, Ferdinand. Yours. And not for sale or rent."

"What did he say to that?" A thin slick of perspiration made his forehead shiny. His eyes looked worried.

Delia dropped her bantering manner. "He made the usual comment."

"Which is?"

"That you wouldn't be around forever."

Taal said nothing. He bent his head forward to ease the collar of his *jusi*-cloth embroidered shirt. It was made of banana fronds and was slightly scratchy.

Delia went around Taal's desk, leaned down and kissed him on top of his sleek dark head. He caught a faint whiff of her perfume and tried to smile at her. "You surely aren't jealous of Señor Valdez, are you, Ferdinand? You have no cause to be."

"Not jealous, no. Yet this Valdez of yours puzzles me, Delia. You're sure his name is Valdez?"

Delia thought he sounded as though he were seeking reassurance. "That's what he told me, darling."

"Well," Taal said, "I have a feeling that his name isn't Valdez."

Delia gave him a curious look. "Who is he then, Ferdinand?"

Taal brooded for a moment. Then he said, "He suggested to you that I might not be around forever. Was that it?"

"Yes. But that's really the usual approach. You know that."

"Did he perhaps mention the name Bollo to you?"

Delia shook her head.

"Or take off his sunglasses while he was with you?"

Again she shook her head, puzzled. "He wears them constantly, even at night. I *did* notice that," she said. "But why do you ask such a strange question?" Her dark eyes were solicitous, silently asking a question of their own.

Taal said, in the manner of a man making an important decision, "Look, Delia." He tapped a small item in the newspaper under his hand on the desk top. She read it over his shoulder.

Under the heading: OCTOPUS KILLER HUNTED, it reported the murder in Singapore of a Malay suspected by police of some connection with the Hong Kong-based smuggling syndicate known as the Octopus. Police were certain, the newspaper reported, that the Malay's murder was another Octopus killing committed by a legendary hoodlum from Manila who usually went by the name of Antonio Bollo but resorted, as occasion demanded, to scores of

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other aliases. Bollo was known to have served as an Octopus assassin on several prior occasions. The article ended by suggesting that Bollo's prematurely white hair, a tattoo on his left arm of a Malay *kriss*, and his spectacularly mismatched eyes—one brown, the other a faded blue—might serve as identification aids. Bollo's arrest was expected momentarily.

When she finished reading, Delia walked around the desk and sank into a chair. She stared at Taal wide-eyed. "Is *that* who Valdez is?" she asked.

Taal nodded somberly. "It would appear so. He's got prematurely white hair. He wears dark glasses all the time to conceal his mismatched eyes. He wears a white drill jacket when all our other customers are in shirt sleeves. That could be to cover up the tattoo on his arm." Taal sucked at the ends of his moustache.

Delia said, "Why should he bother *you*? You haven't done anything wrong, have you?"

Taal stepped around his desk and put his eye to the peephole in his office wall. "He's still at dinner, Delia. Go back into the bar and then out onto the terrace where he is eating. Ask him as a favor to come in and see me when he has finished his dinner. Will you take care of that for me?"

She regarded him dubiously. "If he's really that man in the paper—Bollo, or whatever his name is—you might be asking for trouble, Ferdinand. I don't want to do it."

"Do it," Taal said firmly.

When she had gone, Taal took an unsigned cablegram from the middle drawer of his desk and reread it. Handed in at Kowloon that afternoon, the message was addressed to him at the Mayot Club:

CLUB MEMBER REPORTS UNAUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES YOUR PART. SUGGEST YOU JUSTIFY SOONEST BEFORE SEVERE COUNTERMEASURES UNDERTAKEN HERE.

Taal was perspiring freely now. His hand, holding the cablegram, was not as steady as he could have wished. When the knock finally came on his door, he rose and opened the door himself.

Close up, Valdez's white hair seemed even whiter than at a distance; his dark glasses, darker. He was young, somewhere in his twenties, Taal thought. His expression was a frozen frown, whose sternness was enhanced by the enigmatic glass shields over his eyes. His white drill jacket showed a slight bulge under his left armpit.

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Taal invited him in, motioned him to a chair, and settled himself once more behind his desk. "Señor Valdez?" he said.

"I'm Valdez, yes," said his visitor in a pleasant voice, strangely in contrast with his frown. "And you're Ferdinand Taal, I suppose? Your beautiful singer, Delia, asked me to step in here and see you for a moment."

Taal hid his nervousness. He offered Valdez a cigar which was politely declined. A planter's punch, mixed by Taal himself at a small corner bar, was accepted with thanks. Valdez sipped at it impassively and waited.

Taal cleared his throat and said, "You're not Valdez. You're Bollo."

Valdez raised his eyebrows, the only visible reaction to Taal's challenge. "Who?" he said in surprise.

"Antonio Bollo. Am I right?"

"Wrong. I am Valdez. Lorenzo Valdez. Who is this Bollo?"

"Don't try to deceive me," Taal said. "You are from Hong Kong, Bollo. From the Octopus."

"Are you mad? Who and what is the Octopus?" There was a hint of iron in the words. "I am only a visitor to Zamboanga, Señor Taal—a tourist."

"From where?"

"Manila."

"Manila." Taal wished he could see behind those sunglasses. "I understand that you must have many names to hide behind when you travel on Octopus business," he said delicately. "Nevertheless, you are Bollo. I know it."

Valdez grinned suddenly. His wide mobile lips curled upward. "What makes you think so?" he asked. His smile was colder and more frightening than his frown, Taal thought.

Taal counted on his fingers. "Your white hair. Your long-sleeved jacket in this hot weather. Your sunglasses which you never take off." Taal tapped his newspaper. "It describes you right here in *El Debate*. A description circulated by the Singapore police." Taal paused. "You are Bollo."

"Valdez."

"If you are not Bollo, take off your sunglasses and let me see your eyes."

Silence.

"Or remove your coat and permit me to examine your left arm."

More silence. Then, after a long moment, "You are impertinent, Taal. Is this the way you always treat customers at your Mayot Club?" He was contemptuous.

"You are not a typical customer," Taal said grimly. "Therefore you get special treatment."

"If special treatment includes your beautiful singer," Valdez

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said, "I am glad I qualify for it."

Taal glowered, which seemed to amuse Valdez. He said, "What difference does it make to you whether I am Bollo or Valdez? Is it your concern?"

"It is. Otherwise I would have left you out there to dine in peace."

"Why didn't you?"

Taal rose from his chair, poured himself a tot of dark rum at his corner bar and tossed it down like water. It did nothing for him. When he went back to his desk, he was still accompanied by the sharp sense of danger that his white-haired guest seemed to radiate. Taal made a show of courage. "You're carrying a gun, Bollo," he said, pointing at the bulge under Valdez's jacket. "How do you explain that?"

Valdez laughed, a curiously cold and unhumorous sound. "To travel in the Philippines today without a weapon," he said calmly, "is the same as suicide. You should know that, Señor Taal." He stared at Taal, his sunglasses making the stare blankly impersonal.

Taal suppressed a shiver. "Still," he said, "you are able to laugh about it."

"Only occasionally," said Valdez, sobering. "If you want the truth, the kind of work I do is not calculated to make me laugh very often, I'm sorry to have to say."

Taal nodded. He felt queasy, suddenly. He passed the cablegram across his desk to Valdez. "You know about this?"

Valdez read the cable slowly, moving his lips as he read. "Yes," he said at length, "I know about this."

Taal blew out a breath of mingled relief and impatience. "Then why not admit who you are in the first place? Mr. Ah Boon Cheong in Hong Kong is angry at me for taking over some of the Borneo trade, isn't that it?"

Valdez said nothing.

"Sandro Mercado is a stupid, unreliable, unimaginative man," Taal said earnestly. "He could smuggle in three times as much contraband as he does, you realize that?" Taal tried to make his voice tough and confident. It was not easy. "Tell that to Mr. Cheong in Hong Kong, will you? Does he want to see these great opportunities slip through his fingers just because Mercado has the brains and initiative of a jungle Moro?" He appealed to Valdez as one intelligent man to another.

Valdez responded in a neutral voice. "What is it of Mercado's that's sticking to your fingers, Taal?" No "señor" now, Taal noticed.

"Nothing! I have merely begun

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to exploit a few of the chances he has been missing."

"In his territory?"

"His territory is too big for such a dumb ox to handle! All of Borneo, dammit! Of course I'm operating in his territory! I have to, in order to expand our business. But I haven't cut in on *him*, understand? I'm developing new business, added volume for the Octopus—dealing direct with suppliers in Indonesia, that's all. Bypassing Mercado in Saba. Mercado can't complain. He could have done what I'm doing himself if he had any ambition!"

"Oh?" said Valdez.

"He knows as well as I do, Bollo, that the forward bases maintained in North Borneo by Octopus are capable of handling more than a few million contraband cigarettes a year. And he knows that if he smuggles rice to Indonesia he can exchange it there for opium and copra and cigarettes and smuggle *these* over here to Zamboanga from his base in Labuk Bay without even a whisper of trouble! So why doesn't he do it? He's too stupid, that's why. So I'm doing it for him. I got access to government rice stocks, all on my own. And the trip across the Celebes Sea to Indonesia and back has proved to be almost laughably safe."

"I suppose it would be," Valdez said judiciously. "Mindanao and Palawan are very poorly policed, they say."

Taal laughed. "The whole southern Philippines is poorly policed! My boat captains tell me that they've never even *seen* a police or government guard boat on their trips back and forth. You know something? They call my operation across the Celebes Sea the 'Zamboanga Shuttle,' it's so regular. A quiet ferry run, that's what it is."

Valdez grinned despite himself. Then he sobered. "Mercado didn't say anything about rice. He just said you were trying to take over his cigarette business."

Taal shrugged. "Can I help it if Indonesia gives me some of Mercado's cigarettes for my rice? It's nothing to get hot about, Bollo. I set up this rice-smuggling operation only to show Mr. Cheong that if I had Indonesian Borneo as part of my territory, I'd triple the Octopus' take in a year! Tell Mr. Cheong that, will you?"

"Why didn't *you* tell him?" Valdez asked. He hitched his shoulders to ease them. When his jacket fell momentarily open as a result, Taal saw the soft leather of the holster Valdez was wearing under his arm. "That's the mistake you made, Taal," Valdez said.

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"You should have got in touch with Hong Kong yourself, before you started to operate in Mercado's territory. You know Mr. Cheong's feelings about the sanctity of territories. What is your objective in all this? A larger percentage? Or are you, perhaps, thinking of breaking away from the Octopus and trying to go into business for yourself?" Valdez's question held indefinable menace.

"No, Bollo, no!" Taal was emphatic. "I have no such idea! I merely thought I could *show* Hong Kong how well I could do for them before I bothered Mr. Cheong about Mercado. Do you believe that?"

Valdez shook his head. "To be honest, I don't."

Taal summoned dignity. "It's the truth," he said. "I am no fool, whatever else I am. I know where the power lies in our business. And the organization. And the protection. And the . . ." he looked briefly at Valdez's armpit, ". . . the enforcement."

"Good," Valdez said. "I'm glad you understand these things. Because the information I have is that you're so busy cutting in on Mercado that you aren't setting any records right here in your own territory."

Taal flushed with indignation. His nervousness disappeared, to be replaced by righteous anger. He defended himself with spirit. "That's a downright lie, Bollo! Is there any other territory in the Octopus organization that can show a better record than Mindanao, considering its small size? I have ten warehouses in and around Zamboanga alone! Contraband flows in and out of here faster and in bigger volume than anywhere else in the Philippines!"

Valdez was surprised. "Ten warehouses? More like four or five, the way I heard it."

"Ten!" Taal said. "Didn't you look up the records before you came here? Ten!" He reeled them off, a list of place-names around the peninsula—along Sibuguey Bay, Basilan Strait, the Sulu Sea coastline: Siokun. Sibuco. Isabela. Bolong. Kabasalan. Lamitan. And three storage houses on stilts, cunningly concealed among the scores of similar dwellings in the Moslem settlement of Rio Hondo in Zamboanga City itself.

"That's only nine," Valdez said.

Taal repeated the list and remembered the tenth name.

Valdez nodded. "Ten."

"Do you see?" asked Taal. "My own territory is organized like that throughout. And I could have Indonesia organized the same way if the Octopus would take it away from Mercado and give it to me."

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Valdez said nothing in reply.

Taal's spirits lifted as he realized that Valdez was listening to him seriously now. The interview was on the right track at last. "Will you tell Mr. Cheong about that? Tell him I regret moving in with the rice before informing him. He'll understand if you explain to him why I have done it. Just as I have explained it to you. *Bien?*"

Valdez stood up. To Taal's great relief, he turned toward the door. "*Bien,*" he said. "I'll tell them."

"Good." Taal rose to his feet with a hospitable gesture toward his bar. "Have another drink before you go?"

"No, thank you," said Valdez. He smiled his menacing, curved-lip smile and opened the door. "Give my love to Delia," he said over his shoulder as he went out.

"I'll be happy to do that," Taal said genially. "Good-bye, Bollo."

Forty minutes later, Valdez walked into the headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary in Zamboanga City. He went straight through to the office of Lieutenant Luis Diego. Diego wore the half-exasperated, half-bored expression common to police officers everywhere. He lifted his eyes from the reports he was initialing and looked at Valdez. "Well?" he said.

"I got it all," Valdez said with a grimace of distaste. "The whole rotten operation, right from the mouth of the Octopus, you might say."

Diego brightened and put down his pencil. "Excellent," he said.

"Excellent, indeed," Valdez said. "Ferdinand Taal is our man, just as we guessed in Manila. He's the Octopus *jefe* in Mindanao. By his own admission, he's got the smuggling better organized here than we suspected. Give him another six months and he'll have smuggling between Indonesian Borneo and the Philippines organized equally well."

"What items?" asked Lieutenant Diego.

"Cigarettes, copra, opium, government rice, everything." Valdez rubbed a hand over his white hair and took off his sunglasses. "Damn these dark glasses," he said mildly, "I could hardly see where I was going." His eyes were both an unremarkable brown. He leaned over Diego's desk. "Lieutenant, I've got the name of the big Octopus boss in Hong Kong. I've got the name of the *jefe* of North Borneo and Indonesia, who works out of Labuk Bay in Saba. I've got the locations of ten warehouses for smuggled contraband right here in Zamboanga. It's enough

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for us to be able to cut off at least a few legs of the Octopus."

"How did you get it out of him?" asked Diego with interest. "Was it the phony item about a white-haired, cock-eyed killer named Bollo that we planted in *El Debate* yesterday?"

"That laid the groundwork beautifully. The newspaper was right there on Taal's desk when I went into his office, and he'd been reading the item very obviously. All I had to do was refuse to take off my sunglasses or show him my left arm."

Diego nodded with a certain complacency. "That should show you Manila cops that we're not altogether stupid out here in the provinces," he said. "How did you really get Taal to talk, though?"

"I worked on that girl of his—Delia. Taal got jealous, and that's what made him begin to notice my hair and sunglasses and jacket. But what actually loosened his tongue was the cablegram you had your daughter send him from Hong Kong. He made me read it. I could hardly keep from laughing." Valdez looked at Diego with respect. "How did you know enough about Mercado in Saba to needle Taal with that cablegram?"

"Educated guess," Diego said. "You work on the police force in one place for twenty years, and you learn a lot of little things that sometimes go together to point in one direction." He shrugged. "That's how it was with the Octopus setup here. I didn't know anything for sure, but I could make a lot of guesses."

"Well," Valdez said, "now we're sure. Manila will be pleased. The smuggling of government rice stocks has become a real scandal, believe me. President Marcos himself suggested that I come down here to work with you."

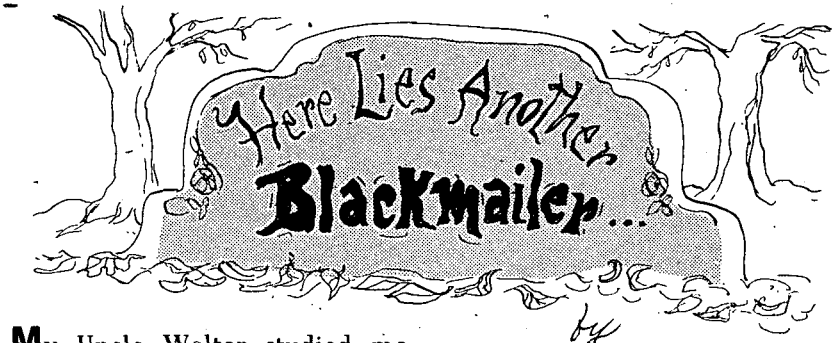
Lieutenant Diego said, "You say you have names and warehouse locations?"

"Yes. They're all here." Valdez took a four-inch tape recorder—a miracle of Japanese miniaturization—from the soft leather holster under his left armpit. He grinned at Lieutenant Diego as he said, "Taal thought it was a gun."



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One's future calling may depend upon finding the right niche.



by Bill Pronzini

My Uncle Walter studied me across the massive oak desk in his library, looking at once irascible, anxious and a little fearful. "I have some questions to ask you, Harold," he said at length, "and I want truthful answers. Completely truthful answers, do you understand?"

"I am not in the habit of lying," I lied stiffly.

"No? To my mind your behavior has always left much to be desired, and has been downright suspect at times. But that is not the issue at hand, except indirectly. The issue at hand is this: where were you at eleven-forty last evening?"

"At eleven-forty? I was in bed, of course."

"You were not," my uncle said sharply. "Elsie saw you going downstairs at five minutes of eleven, fully dressed; she told me about it when I questioned her this morning."

Elsie was the family maid, and much too nosy for her own good. She was also the only person who lived on this small estate except for myself, Uncle Walter, and Aunt Pearl. I frowned and said, "I remember now. I went for a walk."

"At eleven-forty p.m.?"

"I couldn't sleep and I thought the fresh air might help."

"Where did you go on this walk?"

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"Oh, here and there. Just walking, you know."

"Did you leave the grounds?"

"Not that I recall."

"Did you go out by the old carriage house?"

"No," I lied.

My uncle was making an obvious effort to conceal his impatience. "You *were* out by the old carriage house, weren't you?"

"I've already said I wasn't."

"I saw you there, Harold. At least, I'm fairly certain I did. You were lurking in the oleander bushes."

"I do not lurk in bushes," I lied.

"*Somebody* was lurking in the bushes, and it couldn't possibly have been anyone but you. Elsie and Aunt Pearl were both here in the house."

"May I ask a question?"

"What is it?"

"What were *you* doing out by the old carriage house at eleven-forty last night?"

Uncle Walter's face had begun to take on the unpleasant color of raw calf's liver. "What I was doing there is of no consequence. I want to know why you were there, and what you might have seen and heard."

"Was there something to see and hear, Uncle?"

"No, of course not. I just want to know—Look here, Harold, what did you see and hear from those bushes?"

"I wasn't *in* them in the first place, so I couldn't have seen or heard anything, could I?"

Uncle Walter stood abruptly and began to pace the room, his hands folded behind his back. He looked like a pompous old lawyer, which is precisely what he was. Finally he came over to stand in front of my chair, glaring down at me. "You were not out by the carriage house at eleven-forty last night? You did not see anything and you did not hear anything at any time during your alleged walk?"

"No," I lied.

"I have no recourse but to accept your word, then. Actually it doesn't matter whether you were there or not, in one sense, because you refuse to admit it. I trust you will continue to refuse to admit it, to me and to anyone else."

"I don't believe I follow that, Uncle."

"You don't have to follow it. Very well, Harold, that's all."

I stood up and left the library and went out to the sun porch at the rear of the house. When I was certain neither Elsie nor Aunt Pearl was about, and that my uncle had not chosen to pursue me surreptitiously, I slipped out and hurried through the land-

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scaped grounds to the old carriage house. The oleander bushes, where I had been lurking at eleven-forty the previous night after following Uncle Walter from the house—I *had* gone for a short walk, and had noticed him sneaking out—, were located along the southern wall of the building. I passed along parallel to them and around to the back, to the approximate spot where my uncle had stood talking to the man whom he had met there. They had spoken in low tones, of course, but in the late-evening summer stillness I had been able to hear every word. I had also been able to hear the muffled report which had abruptly terminated their conversation.

Now, what, I wondered, glancing around, *did Uncle Walter do with the body?*

The gunshot had startled me somewhat, and I had involuntarily rustled the bushes and therefore been forced to run when my uncle came quickly to investigate. I had then hidden behind one of the privet hedges until I was certain he did not intend to search for me. Minutes later I slipped around by the carriage house again; but I had not been able to locate my uncle and I had not wanted to chance discovery by prowling through the darkness. So I returned to the privet hedge and waited, and twenty-five minutes later Uncle Walter had appeared and gone directly back to the house.

A half hour or so is really not very much time in which to hide a dead man, so I found the body quite easily. It was haphazardly concealed among several tall eucalyptus trees some sixty yards from the carriage house, covered with leaves and strips of aromatic bark which regularly peels from the trees. A rather unimaginative hiding place, to be sure, although it was no doubt intended to be temporary. Uncle Walter had obviously given no prior consideration to body disposal, and had therefore hidden the corpse here until he could think of something more permanent to do with it. If he arrived at a decision by this evening, he would then, I reasoned, return here for the purpose of removal and ultimate secretion.

I uncovered the dead man and studied him for a moment. He was small and slender, with sharp features and close-set eyes. In the same way my uncle looked exactly like what he was, so did this person look like what *he* was, or had been—a criminal, naturally. In his case, a blackmailer—and not at all a clever or cautious one, to have allowed Uncle Walter to talk him into the time and place of

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last night's rendezvous. What excuse had my uncle given him for the unconventionality of it all? Well, no matter. The man really had been quite stupid to have accepted such terms under any circumstances, and was now quite dead as a result.

Yet Uncle Walter was equally as stupid: first, to have put himself in a position where he could be blackmailed; and second, to have perpetrated a carelessly planned and executed homicide on his own property. My uncle, however, was impulsive, and much less bright than he seemed to most people. He also apparently had a predilection for beautiful blonde show girls, about which my Aunt Pearl knew nothing, and about which I also had known nothing until overhearing last evening's conversation. This was the reason he had been blackmailed. He had committed murder because the extortionist wanted considerably more money than he had been getting for his continued silence—and Uncle Walter was a notoriously tightfisted man.

It took me the better part of two hours to move the body. I am not particularly strong, and even though the dead man was small and relatively light, it was a physical struggle to which I am not accustomed. At last, however, I had secreted the blackmailer's remains in what I considered to be quite a clever hiding place—one that was not even on my uncle's property.

Across the dry creek which formed the rear boundary line was a grove of densely-grown trees, and well into them I found a large decaying log, all that was left of a long-dead tree felled by insects or disease. At first glance it seemed to be solid, but upon careful inspection I discovered that it was for the most part hollow. I dragged the body to the log and managed to stuff it inside; then I carefully covered all traces of the entombment. No one venturing into this grove, including my unimaginative uncle, would think of investigating a seemingly solid log.

Satisfied, I returned unobserved to the house, had a bath, and spent the remainder of the day reading in my room.

Uncle Walter was apoplectic. "What did you do with it?" he shouted at me. "What did you *do* with it?"

I looked at him innocently across his desk. It was shortly past eight the following morning, and he had summoned me from my room with furious poundings on the door. I was still in my robe and slippers.

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"What did I do with what?" I asked.

"You know what!"

"I'm afraid I don't, Uncle."

"I know it was you, Harold, just as I knew all along it was you in the oleander bushes two nights ago. So you heard and saw everything, did you? Well, go ahead—admit it."

"I have nothing to admit."

He slapped the desk top angrily with the palm of one hand. "*Why* did you move it? That's what I fail to comprehend. Why, Harold? Why did you move it?"

"Move what?"

"You know what!"

"The conversation seems to be going around in circles," I said. "I really don't know what you're talking about, Uncle."

"Of course you know what I'm talking about! Harold—what did you do with it?"

"With what?"

"You know—" He caught himself, and his face was an interesting color bordering on mauve. "Why do you persist in lying to me? What are you up to?"

"I'm not up to anything," I lied.

"Harold . . ."

"If you're finished with me, I would like to get dressed. This may be the middle of summer, but it's rather chilly in here."

"Yes, get dressed. And then you're coming with me."

"Where are we going?"

"Out to look for it. I want you along."

"What are we going to look for?"

He glared at me malevolently. "I'll find it," he said. "You can't have moved it far. I *will* find it, Harold!"

Of course he didn't.

I knocked on the library door late that evening and stepped inside. Uncle Walter was sitting at his desk, holding his head as if it pained him greatly; his face was gray, and I saw that there were heavy pouches under his eyes. The time, it seemed, was exactly right.

When he saw me, the gray pallor modulated into crimson. He certainly did change color often, somewhat like a chameleon. "You," he said. "You!"

"Are you feeling all right, Uncle? You don't look very well at all."

"If you weren't a relative of mine, if you weren't— Oh, what's the use? Harold, look, just tell me what you did with it. I just want to know that it's . . . safe. Do you understand?"

"Not really," I said. I looked at him steadily. "But I seem to have the feeling that whatever it is you

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were looking for today *is* safe."

He brightened. "Are you sure?"

"One can never be sure about anything, can one?"

"What does that mean?"

I sat down and said seriously, "You know, Uncle, I've been thinking. My monthly allowance is really rather small, and I wonder if you could see your way clear to raising it."

His hands gripped the edge of his desk. "So that's it."

"What's it?"

"What you're up to, why you keep lying to me and why you moved the . . . *it*. All I've done is trade one blackmailer for another, and my own nephew at that!"

"Blackmailer?" I managed to look shocked. "What a terrible thing to say, Uncle. I'm only asking politely for an increase in my monthly allowance. That's not the same thing at all, is it?"

His face took on a thoughtful expression, and he calmed down considerably. "No," he said. "No, it isn't. Of course not. Very well, then, you shall have your increase. Now, where is it?"

"Where is what?" I asked.

"Now look here—"

"I still don't know what it is you're talking about," I said. "But then, if I weren't to get my increase—or if I were to get it and it should suddenly be revoked—I suppose I could find out easily enough what is going on. I could talk to Aunt Pearl, or even to the police . . ."

My uncle sighed resignedly. "You've made your point, Harold. I suppose the only important thing is that . . . *it* is safe, and you've already told me that much, haven't you? Well, how much of an increase do you want?"

"Triple the present sum, I think."

"One hundred and fifty dollars a month?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do with that much money? You're only eleven years old!"

"I'll think of something, Uncle. I'm very clever, you know."

He closed his eyes. "All right, consider your allowance tripled, but you're never to request a single penny more. Not a single penny, Harold."

"Oh, I won't—not a single penny," I lied, and smiled inwardly. Unlike most everyone else of my age, I knew just exactly what I was going to be when I grew up . . .

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When the cards are stacked, bigamy may be the only solution.



Eleanor awoke with a dull headache and a sense of foreboding made more acute by the sound of the mailman's whistling. *I'll call Trish,* she thought, *and we'll go to the club for a late lunch and then I'll pick up my watch and search for a blouse to go with that cardigan, and if there's time we might see that film at the Winter Garden.* How joyless it all sounded, as joyless as the mailman's whistling; mailman, mailman, devil's messenger, dark angel of doom.

Paranoid fancy, of course, but sometimes she wondered if the mailman were Alice's accomplice, because the letter was never immediately visible but always tucked between the others, as if to inspire a hope that would be cruelly shattered the moment she thumbed through and found it.

She lingered in her bath and at her dressing table as long as she could before going downstairs and looking in the box.

Typewritten as always, there was the same arrogant, cheap scent of orange blossom. Her fingers shook as she pulled it out.

Dear Eleanor,

You dumb broad. Why don't you give yourself a Clorox cocktail or stick your ugly head in the oven? Want me to do it for you? You got away with murder, I

by Donald Olson

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ought to be able to, I'm forty times smarter than you'll ever be. Wise up. Let him go. He's already mine in BODY. You might as well give me the rest of him. Think I'm kidding? Do I have to mention a certain S-shaped birthmark to convince you? I mean, how else would I know about that?

Hate forever,
Alice



It all came back, the dryness in her throat, the trembling, the icy, crawling worm inching up her spine, the terrible headaches. She burned the letter over the kitchen range, but the cloying scent of orange blossom seemed to hang in the room.

Van Steg was in Europe and she didn't want to see a new man and have to go through that ordeal again, those endless exhausting soul probes. Why should it be necessary? When she *knew*?

In the end, after the third letter, she called Trish and gave her the news over lunch. "Alice is back."

Trish looked startled, her Eve Arden grimace. "You don't mean—*Alice*."

"I mean Alice. She's back. I've had three letters. The first one came just three weeks after Bob and I got back from our honeymoon. Oh, Trish, it was like thinking I'd been cured of some hideous disease and finding it was still there, just as virulent. And Van Steg's in Europe. I don't know what to do."

"You've told Bob, of course."

"No!"

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"Why not?" Trish persisted.

"Oh, Trish, really. You don't marry a man, go on a honeymoon with him and come home and tell him you're a crackpot but he's stuck with you. What a way to begin a new life."

"But Bob would understand. You know he would."

"That's not the point. A part of the past—the part I wanted to forget forever—would be part of this life then. Part of Bob and me. No. I don't want Bob ever to know about Alice. Not ever."

"Okay, I won't breathe a word, if that's what you mean. But, good heavens, why should she come back *now*? Van Steg told you she was gone for good. Not that I put much stock in what *they* say."

"The point is, she's back."

"What does she want?"

"Bob."

Trish's graceful hand, curved around the cup, paused midway to her luscious mouth, while her limpid green eyes gaped. "Oh, boy. That's one for the books."

"I know. It's absurd. But that's what she wants. Oh, it's perfectly clear to me, Trish. Alice wanted to punish me for Carl's death. And God knows she *did*. You'll never know what I went through with those awful letters. Then, with Van Steg's help, I realized I wasn't to blame for Carl's death even if I was driving the car. And when Alice found out she couldn't destroy me she gave up and went away. You know how frightful those first two years were after Carl's death. I had nothing to fall back on."

"Except that bottomless bag of pennies." Trish always spoke of money in a tone of respect she never wasted on even her nearest and dearest kin.

"Which meant nothing to me," Eleanor retorted. "Life meant nothing to me. An emptiness—a dismal vacuum—until Bob came along. It *has* been a new life for me, Trish. Can you blame me for not wanting to spoil it? And Alice would spoil it. Alice *wants* to spoil it."

Trish appeared crestfallen when Eleanor told her she had burned all the letters.

"Well, don't burn the next one, honey—if there is a next one. I want to see it. And I still think you ought to tell Bob."

"Never. I'll just have to put up with it till Van Steg gets back."

That next letter came two days later, by which time Eleanor was hard pressed to keep Bob from suspecting something was wrong; she had no gift for emotional concealment.

Dear Stupid,

My patience is wearing thin.

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You know I mean business. Bob doesn't really love you. He never did. You're nothing but little Miss Moneybags to him. And if you don't think I've got your man in my pocket—look in his.

Alice

She showed the letter to Trish.

"Well," said her friend, with the morbid eagerness only a friend would dare express so openly, "did you look in his pocket?"

"Yes. I found this."

She held the sleazy handkerchief as if her fingers were tongs. It reeked of orange blossom.

"Same old stinky Alice," Trish observed wryly.

"It's not funny, Trish."

"So who's laughing? But at the same time, can you imagine a more peculiar triangle?"

"A two-sided triangle, you mean." Eleanor was bitter.

Trish did her best to comfort Eleanor. "I mean, she can't *do* anything. She can't very well take Bob away from you. And when Van Steg gets back he'll put dear Alice in her place."

"But why should he have to? That's what scares me, Trish. I *know*. So I should be able to handle Alice myself. And I know why she came back. That guilt feeling is still there. Alice was perfectly happy to stay in the background as long as I was miserable. My misery is Alice's happiness. But as soon as I married Bob—as soon as I showed signs of being really happy again—then she's up in arms again. What if Van Steg was wrong about Alice? I mean completely wrong. What if she comes back every time I begin to feel happy?"

Trish spread her hands. "You might try being miserable. Let's see, there must be something you could be miserable about." She looked critically at Eleanor. "You're chic, you're loaded, you've got a terrific-looking husband, you live in a gorgeous showplace in a beautiful city . . . Oh, come on, think, girl. There must be *some*thing you can be miserable about."

Eleanor had to smile, and after a bit more of the same kind of ribbing, she was even laughing, but the mood vanished as soon as lunch was over and Trish was off to her work at the advertising agency. Eleanor wandered through the shops, bought a ticket to a film but then walked out before it had even begun, having felt that Alice was right there in the next seat, threatening her in the dark.

"Bad day?" Bob asked, almost as soon as he set foot in the house.

"No. Why?"

"I don't know. You look a bit

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fuzzy to me," he said solicitously.

"*Fuzzy?*" She laughed at his choice of words. "I had lunch with Trish. Would that account for any—fuzziness?"

"I'd say so, yes."

"That's not nice. But Trish is so terribly *up* all the time. And then she zipped off to her job and I guess I suddenly felt so utterly useless—such a hanger-on. A mere dawdler."

"Darling, you're anything but useless. I ought to know. I'll bet I know what's bugging you. You've hit a snag with your painting. And how do I know that, Dr. Watson? No smears."

He examined each of her fingers, kissing each one as he released it.

"Not really," she said. "I simply haven't been in the mood." Which was one of the effects Alice's last rampage had caused. Eleanor had been unable to finish even a tiny sketch while Alice was on the scene.

She tried to be more lively, suggested they invite the Drews over for bridge; better than facing the evening alone with Bob, pretending everything was fine. She could worry over her cards and get away with it.

She was nervous, however, and when she was nervous she was clumsy, and when she was slicing the bread for sandwiches just before the Drews arrived, the electric knife slipped and nicked her wrist. She put a bandage on it and changed into a long-sleeved blouse, but Sally Drew had the sharpest eyes in town and remarked flippantly, "Never try it *that* way, pet. Pills are ever so much neater."

It was a brave jest, not a mean one, and they all knew it. During a period of depression after her second baby had been born Sally had taken a nearly fatal overdose of sleeping pills.

"If the person knows what she's doing," quipped her husband, and the subject was dropped.

A letter arrived two days later.

Dear Clumsy Oaf,

You want to see some fancy knife-work you just keep on defying me. I'll cut you up, sister. I mean it. I've had it with you. I've given you every chance to give him up. I'm going to have him even if I have to slit your rotten scrawny throat. And don't think I won't, either. What a gas it'll be to see your RED BLOOD FLOW.

Detestingly yours,
Alice

Dry-tongued, Eleanor crumpled the letter in her fist; then, instead of burning it, she rushed to the phone and called Trish. She supposed she sounded more than a

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bit hysterical because Trish promised to grab a taxi and be right over.

"Now, stop *bawling*, for Pete's sake. Where's the vodka? Don't you have any vodka? How can I make you a bloody mary without vodka?"

"I don't want a bloody mary. And that joke is in very poor taste."

"Sorry. It wasn't a joke. Okay then, what do you want? Ovaltine?"

"I want to get rid of Alice! Once and for all. I can't go through this again, Trish. I haven't the stamina."

"Well, tell me what shelf it's on and I'll get you some."

"Trish, darling, it's no good. You can't wisecrack me out of this—box I'm in."

Trish sat down beside her and wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

"What did she mean about the knife?"

Eleanor told her about the accident with the bread knife.

Trish sniffed. "That dame doesn't miss a trick, does she? Too bad you can't get her a job with the C.I.A. In Outer Mongolia."

"But you said she couldn't do anything. She intends to kill me!"

"Oh, even she's not that loony. She must know she'd only be hurting herself by killing you."

"Believe me, she's vindictive enough to cut herself off to spite her nose."

"Laugh, laugh."

"Yeah, laugh, laugh."

"Now that's the ticket, honey. Maybe if you didn't take Alice so seriously . . ."

"Don't think about her and she'll go away? It's not that simple. And I know Bob thinks something fishy is going on. I've caught him looking at me in a funny way."

"Then why not tell the poor guy?"

"I told you why not. Our marriage is too new to have old scars."

Trish gave her a long, considering look. "You have *no* recollection of—well, when Alice is—"

"No. Any more than I did the last time."

"You don't like to talk about it, do you?"

"I don't like to *dwell* on it. I just want Alice to go away. Before something terrible happens."

This time, unlike the last, it would be pointless to consult the police or the F.B.I. If only Van Steg would get back; she was sure Van Steg was the only one who could help her.

That evening, just before Bob came home, she tripped on the

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rug and fell halfway down the stairs. Alice jeered.

Dear Stumble-Bum,

You were lucky that time. Next time I'll make sure. There's still time to save your slimy skin. GIVE HIM UP. Tell him you're leaving him. Tell him you've met somebody else. This is positively your LAST CHANCE.

Alice

Terrified, she wondered if she might be able to fool Alice. Was it worth a try?

She told Bob she felt like getting away for a week or two; maybe drive down to Carmel and see her mother.

"Why jump the gun? We'll be seeing her next month."

"I've had a feeling about her. I think she needs me."

"Is that what's been bothering you?"

"You've noticed."

"I've noticed."

"Would you mind terribly?"

"Why can't you phone?"

"You know Mother. If something *were* wrong she'd never tell me."

"If that's what you want to do, then, of course. I'll come down when we planned."

Memory stabbed her as she got into the car, for it was so deadly familiar; each move, gesture, reaction. This was the way it had all started, when she and Carl, her first husband, had begun that trip to Carmel. It had been after the party at the Bronsons' when she'd had too many manhattans and knew she shouldn't drive, and poor Carl had begged her to let him take the wheel and she had flared up at him because she knew she had been drinking too much lately and hated to have it made so obvious to Carl, who was such an absolute saint. She had said malicious, cutting things to him as she'd careened out of the driveway and swerved into a telephone pole at the foot of the hill . . . and killed Carl.

She had assumed, when the first letters began to arrive shortly after Carl's funeral, that the woman who signed herself "Alice" might have been an old girlfriend of Carl's, or perhaps a relative; they were vicious, obscene, scathing, and they went not only to her but to the police and the F.B.I.—as she found out when the police came to call.

She had sworn she knew no one named Alice, which had made the police even more suspicious, and they had conducted a thorough investigation to locate this accusing female—and they had found her. They had identified the typewriter on which the letters had been typed and they had traced the sta-

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tionery and the scent, the trail leading them in a circle—back to Eleanor.

The shock of learning Alice's identity had been worse than the impact of Carl's death, and the very worst moments of her life had been when she'd sat in the psychiatrist's office and heard the prim-looking Dr. Van Steg describe the mental disorder which had brought Alice to life. Alice, he had explained, was the manifestation of another "self"—a case of split personality. As Van Steg explained it, Eleanor had suffered massive guilt feelings after Carl's death, which had led to the liberation of "Alice." Alice had risen up to rebuke her, to scourge and threaten and punish her. *Some*one had to punish her. The law wouldn't—the law didn't consider her culpable in Carl's death—and though she had thought seriously of suicide she hadn't been able to summon up the will to act on the impulse. There was only Alice.

Those sessions with Van Steg had continued over several months and ultimately, with his help, she had rid herself of those destructive guilt feelings. The letters had ceased and so had the headaches and the vague feelings of disorientation.

Now, as she started down that same hill, she felt such a strong presentiment of disaster there was hardly any panic when she realized the brakes were not working. She jerked the wheel savagely to the right, then released it and covered her face with her arms as the car crashed into the gully.

She was hysterical when they pulled her out of the car, unhurt but hysterical, and not until much later did she learn that she had talked about Alice; had screamed, while they were rescuing her from the wreckage, that Alice had tried to kill her.

The whole thing had to come out then, of course. She told the police that Lieutenant Bannerman would explain the whole thing to them, that Bannerman knew all about Alice, but it was left to her to confess everything to Bob, and even though his reaction was all love and sympathy and understanding, she still deplored the need to have him know.

"But what a little idiot you are," he scolded her, between kisses. "How on earth could such a thing damage *our* relationship?"

"But it's a sickness, Bob. I thought it was over. If I hadn't thought that, I would never have married you."

"It's hardly some vile disease, sweetheart. In fact, it's pretty darned fascinating, if you ask me. Adds to your allure—if that's pos-

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sible," Bob assured her frankly.

"It's freaky, that's what it is."

"Well, you're a beautiful, darling freak and I love you." He put his lips close to her ear. "And as for you, Alice, if you're in there, you may as well give up. You haven't got a chance."

"She'll try again," Eleanor said. "She'll keep trying."

"Darling, haven't you any recollection at all of tampering with the brakes?"

She gave him a languishing, hopeless smile. "Me? I wouldn't even know where the brakes *are*. But Alice—she's another person, Bob. You've got to understand that. Another personality entirely. We share the same body, that's all. But Alice can do things with her hands that clumsy old me wouldn't have the dimmest notion how to do. It's like a dream, you know. In a dream we say and do things we really couldn't do when we're awake."

Bob insisted they not wait until Van Steg came back. There were other psychiatrists in San Francisco, just as good if not better.

Eleanor demurred. What no one seemed to understand was her feeling of repugnance, of something like shame, associated with Alice. It was dreadful to have to admit even to herself that any facet of her personality could be as vicious, obscene, and irrational as Alice. Alice was like some grotesque birthmark or scar which she didn't particularly care to display to the curious. No, she would wait for Van Steg's return.

Dear Bird-Brain,

Your luck is running out. No more dry runs. Your number comes up for real next time. Better order the lilies and open the family crypt. It's die time, witch.

Alice

She'd had to prove it to Bob's satisfaction, prove that the letter had been written on her own typewriter, had to point out to him the characteristic wedge on the tail of the "y"; incriminating as a fingerprint.

"I'm starting my vacation right now," he said. "I'm not leaving your side day or night. You just leave Alice to me."

Yet that was exactly what she wanted to avoid—any interference in their lives by the unspeakable Alice. "Van Steg will be back Monday. I'll be his first patient."

Although she wanted to see Van Steg alone, of course, she didn't want to go alone any more than Bob wanted her to drive anywhere alone, and so she agreed that Trish might go with her.

With his blunt face, spiky, grizzled hair, and stocky body, Van Steg still looked more like a

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plumber to her than a psychiatrist, and as she walked into his office she felt a spasm of hard-to-suppress mirth as it occurred to her that he might not really be a psychiatrist—maybe he was a plumber masquerading as one, and knew no more about the Alices of this world than she did.

Then, as the door was closed behind her, she felt a just as unaccountable urge to cry as she began to tell him about Alice's return to life.

She came out neither crying nor smiling.

Trish seemed uncertain how to react. "Do we have lunch to celebrate—or just to boost our spirits?"

"Let's not eat right away, Trish. I'm still all keyed up. Let's drive down the coast a ways, shall we?"

Trish didn't pump her about the session until they finally stopped to eat at a seafood place overlooking the ocean.

"Well, give, honey. What's the verdict?"

"It's too early to say. Van Steg's going to hypnotize me next time and see if he can draw Alice out. So he can find out firsthand what she's up to, I suppose."

"Frankly, you look better already."

"I trust Dr. Van Steg."

"Shall we order? The lobster here is sensational."

"Yes. I've suddenly got the most ravenous appetite."

That night she told Bob that she wanted to run down to Carmel to see her mother, that Van Steg had thought it would be a good idea for her to get away from the city for a while.

"He thinks it's okay for you to drive?"

"No. I'll take the bus."

Bob saw her off, but she did not go to Carmel, not all the way. In fact, she got out at the first stop and hired a cab to drive her back to San Francisco, where she took a room at a small hotel on Geary Street. She stayed in that room all day, smoking cigarettes and staring at the TV, not even going out to eat. She didn't turn on any lights when it got dark but simply waited there in the room until after midnight, and then she went out and took a cab to Russian Hill, getting out several blocks from their house. There was no light in the windows.

She used her key and very quietly let herself in the back door.

They were both asleep up there, like innocent babes. She stood looking down at them for a moment or two, then she smiled and just as quietly let herself out.

At ten the next morning she called Bob's office, disguising her

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voice, and when she was told that he was in she hung up. She walked to a wig salon and bought a blonde wig, went back to the hotel and did some work on her face. She liked the effect she finally achieved. It was like seeing a strange woman in the mirror. It was like meeting Alice face to face for the first time. All that mattered, of course, was that she didn't look like herself. She didn't want any of the neighbors to report they'd seen her at the house in the morning.

She took a cab to Russian Hill and once more walked the couple of blocks to their house. She met no one she recognized.

"Where the hell have you been?" Bob demanded, red-eyed, distraught. "I called Carmel. Your mother hadn't seen you."

"I didn't go to Carmel."

"Then where were you? I've been worried sick."

She put a hand to her forehead. "I don't know. I woke up in some hotel on Geary Street with a splitting headache."

He seemed uncertain how to take this. "You heard about Trish?"

She nodded. "Ghastly. Do you still have the note?"

"The cops took it."

"Poor Trish. And I thought *I* was mixed up. Just imagine, to come here and write a suicide note and jump out of *our* window. How dreadful. I never dreamed she was in love with you, Bob."

He was watching her closely, as if to see how far she was audacious enough to carry it.

"Don't lie to me, Eleanor. Trish never wrote that note and she never jumped out of that window."

Eleanor smiled. "And she was never in love with you?"

He didn't say anything.

"We may as well both stop lying, Bob. No, maybe Trish didn't write that suicide note. Maybe you did. It was on the desk when I came here this morning. Or when Alice did. Excuse me. I suppose you and Trish spent part of the night composing it. *My* suicide note. And when were you going to fake my suicide? When were you going to kill me, Bob?"

"How did you find out?"

She smiled. "When I saw Van Steg. He accused me of faking. He even hypnotized me and tried to reach Alice. He couldn't. Alice is part of *me*, Bob. Part of *my* personality. My fully integrated personality. So I began putting the pieces together. It was you who wrote the last Alice letters—and Trish probably mailed them. It was you who tampered with

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those brakes. It was you who fixed the rug so I'd trip on the stairs. And when finally I would have killed myself no one would ever believe it wasn't because of Alice. Even Van Steg would have been a witness. And the Drews—I suppose you told them that the accident with the electric knife was no accident at all, but a botched suicide attempt."

For the first time she saw hatred, naked and brutal, on the face of the man she loved.

"You've only destroyed yourself," he said. "Sure, it was for your money. The only difference is that now I won't have to split it with Trish."

She slowly shook her head. "You're not going to tell the police I killed Trish, Bob. That would be dumb. And even if you did, there's hardly a chance I'd be convicted. Juries are very sophisticated these days. If they convicted anyone it would be Alice. And thanks to your elaborate plot they would believe Alice really did come back. I certainly don't think that you would admit you wrote the Alice letters. No, my dear, all you're going to do is be a very good little boy from now on."

For such a handsome man she thought he looked quite ugly with his mouth hanging open that way.

"You mean, you'd have us—go on . . ."

"But of course," she said. "The old me—the pre-Alice me—would have sobbed and swooned and probably run home to Mommy. Or turned into a full-fledged neurotic. But you've got Alice to deal with now, sweetheart. Alice is part of me. We're one and indivisible. And Alice is a fighter. Alice won't give up her man. Alice is very hip and very sharp and strictly on the ball. The old Eleanor would have given you up, but not Eleanor-Alice. Not ever. And if you try any funny business I'll have you up for attempted murder. Is that quite clear, darling?"

He finally gave her a grudging nod.

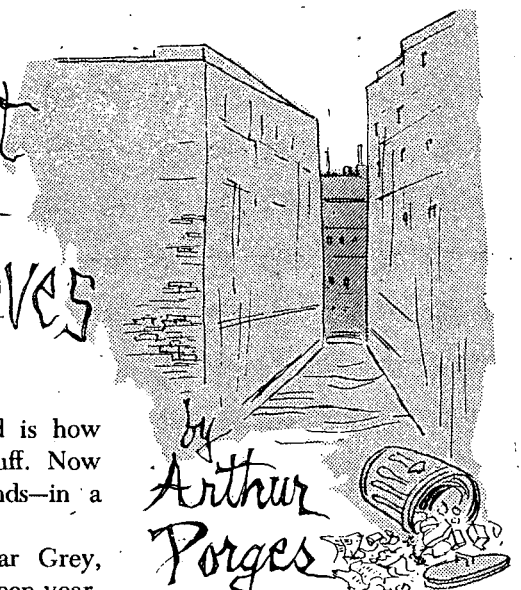
She smiled. "That's better. We're going to be very happy together, you and Alice and I. Come here now and give *us* a kiss."



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Even a misdemeanor may be difficult to prove without a viable suspect.

The Scientist and the Two Thieves



by Arthur Porges

What I can't understand is how you cops keep losing stuff. Now it's a fortune in diamonds—in a blind alley, too. Tsk!"

The speaker was Edgar Grey, who had a normal fourteen-year-old, run-of-the-mill body—Model Naked Ape, Junior—but a space-age brain that sparked an I.Q. of 180, often rising higher under forced draft. He also had a somewhat mordant sense of humor better suited to George Bernard Shaw at ninety.

This time, however, his comment was entirely without malice; he liked Lieutenant Trask. The feeling was mutual, but in the detective's case it was spiced with a soupçon of awe. The mental machinery behind that freckled young face could be disconcerting on occasion.

Cyriack Skinner Grey, the boy's father, a scientist and a sometime crime consultant, took in the scene with benign amusement.

"A hit—a palpable hit," he said. "Edgar has a point. You chased the robber into a cul-de-sac, presumably with his loot. The only entrance was then blocked; there

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was no way out, yet the stones vanished. I remember Wilde's quip that to lose one parent may be regarded as a misfortune, but to lose both smacks of carelessness."

Trask grinned. "It is rather funny in the abstract," he admitted. "But fifty thousand dollars' worth of property has been stolen, and that's serious. Worst of it is that Lou Burgin's not even a criminal type; more of a religious nut. He robbed, I suspect, only to finance his new 'Stand Tall for Christ' movement. You should see his room—full of tracts, collections of musty sermons, garish photos, medals, crosses, icons, you name it—and a dozen Bibles, some fancy and illustrated. There's a Doré that made Cliff Garrett lick his chops—he's a book-collector. But Burgin reads while eating—even Doré—and isn't very dainty, so when Cliff saw the inner pages, wow! I was afraid we'd be booking him on Murder One!"

Grey pressed a button in one arm of his wheelchair; there was a hissing sound, and the smell of coffee, expertly brewed, filled the room. A tiny ceramic cup rose from a recess. Grey handed it to Trask, who sipped the Kona—the scientist's private blend—with appreciation.

"Suppose you start from the beginning," Grey said. "As I understand it, Burgin caught the manager about closing time, forced him to open the safe, and then made off with a packet of diamonds. And he used a gun."

"Right," the lieutenant said. "But I doubt he'd have fired it. Anyhow, when Kelly, the off-duty detective, happened to see him running from the place, he gave chase. Burgin panicked and got trapped in that blind alley. He threw the gun away while running, but must have wiped it clean—even the dumbest amateurs know that much these days.

"Well, no officer is supposed to go after a felon alone; Burgin might have had another gun for all Kelly knew. So he followed the book and waited at the head of the alley, knowing the robber couldn't get away. But, as I've said, when the cruiser came with help, and the men advanced, Burgin gave up without a fight—only there were no diamonds."

"Did he drop them on the way?" Grey asked.

"Almost impossible. Kelly was right behind him and it was a short run along open walks. Anyway, we searched the route immediately and found nothing."

"But you did mention the light was bad; it was about dusk."

"True, but the one block he ran

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was well-lit, and Kelly is certain he didn't dump anything—not before entering the alley. And if the loot is in there, we sure can't find the stuff."

"With no prints on the gun, and no diamonds, you don't have much of a case against Burgin," Edgar said. It was not meant as a jibe; his tone was sympathetic.

"That's right. But getting the diamonds back is more important," Trask said. He drank the last of the coffee, smiled wryly, and added, "There's even beginner's luck in the crime. This clown made a heist any pro would envy, but he picked the Ace Jewelers at random, knows almost nothing about gems, and got this packet because the manager was scared spitless—afraid of guns—and Burgin's old .45 may be too corroded to fire!"

"Don't blame the manager a bit," the scientist said. "Any sane person should be afraid of a .45." He touched the cigar button, received two Havanas, and tossed one to Trask. "What's the alley like?"

"One side is a big apartment building; the other's the old State Theater—abandoned, boarded up; just a housing project now for pigeons, sparrows, even a few crows. It was dark in the alley, none of the tenants saw a thing. The diamonds aren't hidden anywhere—that I'll swear."

"The roofs? Could he have thrown them up on one?"

Trask shook his head, "A top outfielder might make the roof of the theater, but Burgin's a weedy little guy. Not one man in a hundred could do it."

"What was the weight of the package?"

"About four ounces. A small sack, actually, made of soft leather, I believe."

"Good for throwing," Grey pointed out.

"I agree. But where to? The apartment is six stories, and State Theater a bit lower, about five."

"I can't say you're wrong; that's quite a throw," the scientist admitted. "Well, suppose you give me the data and photos. I'll read through the material and try to figure some angle. And I'll pick Edgar's brain, too; he's beginning to stagnate lately!"

"Good idea," Trask said gravely. "Give his peers a chance to catch up."

"At least he's starting to enjoy poetry as well as math," Grey said. "Yesterday he was quoting *The Jackdaw of Rheims*—ever read the *Ingoldsby Legends*? Quite good light verse; much better than most of the genre we see today."

"If Ogden Nash wrote 'em, yes;

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otherwise, no," the detective said, grinning. "See you later—I hope," and he left.

It was a comparatively thin file that Grey studied. The case was almost too simple. The tenants had little to contribute; details of the search were useless as generators of good ideas. After ninety minutes the scientist put down the folder and sighed. Only one tiny implication worth investigating. He maneuvered the powered wheelchair to a phone and called Trask.

"I don't really have a damned thing," he said right off. "But I'm mildly intrigued by the overturned trash can."

"We didn't find any diamonds there," Trask assured him.

"That's clear enough from your data. But would it be too much trouble to have the tenants inspect the contents and tell you if anything is missing?" Then he added in an anxious voice, "You've sealed off the area, of course."

"You bet. Until we rule out that the stuff is there someplace. I can't imagine," he went on, "why anything taken from the trash means much—if Burgin dumped the can—but knowing you, I'll get the information immediately."

"Fine," Grey said. "Let me know if anybody misses anything he or she threw out."

"I'll do that," Trask promised, and hung up.

Late in the afternoon Trask called back. "Only thing I have," he said, "is what one woman told us. There was fancy paper from a gift in the trash, but the string, a colored, flashy tinsel type, was gone." He paused, then asked, "That suggest anything to you?"

"Not so fast," was the plaintive reply. "Give me time to think—meaning right now I've not the foggiest idea it means a blooming thing. Why should it?"

"That's your bag," Trask said. "Plausible inferences."

"I'll set the inferencer to work, but promise nothing. String, eh? I wonder. Call you back if something surfaces." He hung up, and with something like a sigh, opened the folder again.

Two hours later he rang up Trask. "Wild idea," he said, "but plausible in a way. Biblical scholar, string—does that suggest anything?"

"Not to me. Should it?"

"What if Burgin got ingenious? Been reading about David. Dumped that trash can looking for a cord; found the string, tied it to the sack—"

"By gad!" the detective breathed. "A sling! With that he

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could make one of the roofs. If you whirl a stone hard and fast—I've done it as a kid—it really carries."

"It's certainly a possibility," Grey said. "And the only one I can offer you. So try the roofs."

The expected call from Trask came the next morning. The lieutenant sounded very subdued, almost embarrassed. "I'm sorry," he said. "Nothing on either roof. I really thought you had the solution, too."

There was a pregnant silence, then Grey said, "Odd. Nothing? Hmm . . . I was beginning to feel rather sure . . ." He laughed. "Just as well, maybe. I shouldn't expect to score every time. Not that I'll give up, so, back to the old drawing board. What's left? Not on the roof—imagine that!"

After hanging up Grey sat unmoving, a faint frown on his face. He saw in his theater of the mind an intriguing drama. The frantic thief, trapped in the blind alley, his hasty rummaging of the trash can, the finding of a string—then Burgin whirling the little sack faster and faster, angling it more to the vertical—and the calculated release, with the bag and comet tail of glittery cord soaring to a rooftop . . . and then—and then the screen went blank . . .

Now he turned to the photos. The State Theater roof was more likely; the apartment house was really too high even for a sling. All right, what was up there? Again the screen glowed . . . pigeons, not his pet birds—flying rats, they were called, and rightly—dirty, not very birdlike compared to robins, jays, jackdaws . . . *Jackdaws* . . . *Rheims* . . . and the light came . . .

"Binoculars?" Trask asked in a bewildered tone. "Sure we have 'em—good 7 by 50's. What do I look for, and where?"

"I must warn you," Grey said, "it's a long shot—longest shot since the 75-mile Paris gun."

"Your long shot is better than point-blank with some, so fire away."

"All right. You scrutinize the trees, the taller ones, on all sides of the two buildings. What you're looking for is that flashy string with, I devoutly hope, the sack of diamonds still attached. And no questions, please; my neck is already out ten miles. Just search, and if you find them—"

"You'll hear about it," the lieutenant said, and tactfully added not another word.

Later, at a triumphal conclave, Grey explained in detail. "I was almost certain that Burgin did use

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a sling; why else would a string be missing from the trash? Kids nowadays have too many toys to collect things the way we did in my generation. But after landing on the roof of the theater the diamonds must have disappeared again if I were right. Yet the building was boarded up, the roof quite inaccessible—except to birds. Then I happened to think of Edgar and the jackdaw from *Ingoldsby*. You," he looked at Trask, "did mention a few crows on the roof. Odd, by the way, how in recent years they've taken to urban areas. When I was a boy you rarely saw one even in a small town, much less a city; but with farms dying out—well, no matter. Point is they love bright objects. What member of the Corvidae could resist that glittering piece of string? He'd surely take it to his nest or perching place. Four or five ounces is no burden for a big crow. So it was a double theft—first Burgin, then a greedy bird!"

"I had to get a snorkel from the fire department," the detective said. "The sack was up in a tall tree; luckily, as you thought, the flashy cord made it easy to spot with binoculars. After only a dozen trees, too—might have been fifty. How far can a crow fly?"

"Quite a ways," Grey said. "But it was reasonable that a bird using the State Theater roof had its perch close by."

"The Jackdaw of Rheims," Edgar said, "stole a bishop's ring and was cursed with all the power of the church; it plumb near ruint him!"

"Not that the bishop hated birds," the scientist added. "That clerical broadside was against the 'thief'—he had no notion, until later, that a jackdaw had swiped his episcopal ring."

"By the way," Edgar asked, grinning, "when do you pick up the guilty crow and book him for grand theft, jewelry or whatever?"

Trask's mouth twitched. "First off, you disguised midget," he said, "there was no felony committed; merely failure to report finding stolen merchandise—a misdemeanor. Secondly, you have my word that if somebody can pick the thief out from among six other crows at the lineup, he'll be charged!"

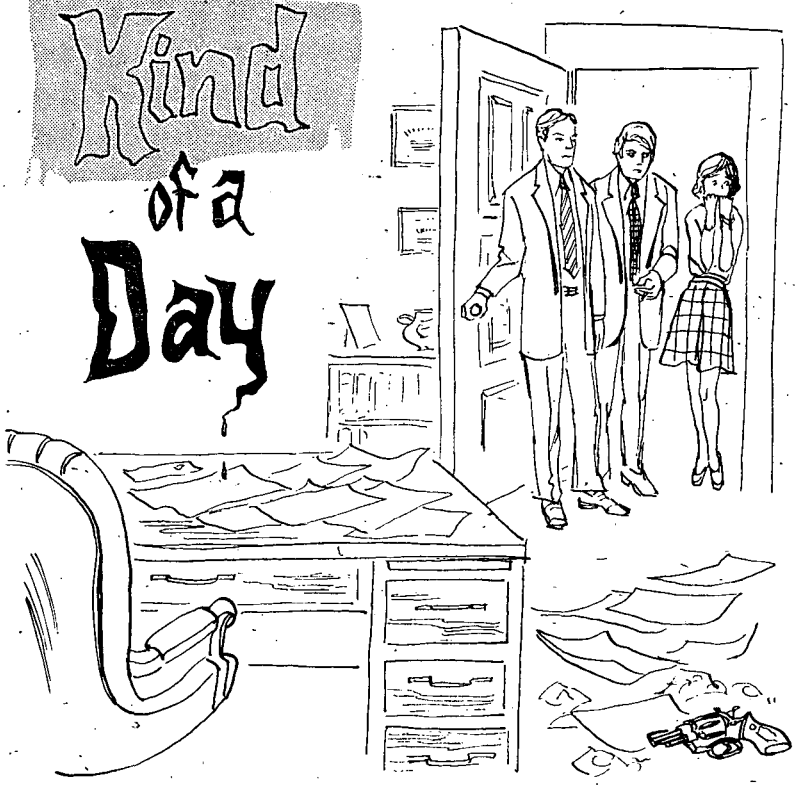
The lieutenant stalked off, much elated. It was not often that he had the last word with Edgar.

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Despite the most efficacious investigation, many a problem terminates in a redoubtable quandary.

That Kind of a Day

Traynor got the call at a quarter to nine. The girl on the line was named Linda Haber and she was a secretary—the secretary—at Hofert & Jordan. The boss had been shot,



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she kept saying. It took Traynor close to five minutes to find out who she was and where she was and to tell her to sit down and stay put. She was still babbling hysterically when he hung up on her and pulled Phil Grey away from a cup of coffee. He said, "Homicide, downtown and west. Let's go."

Hofert & Jordan had two and a half rooms of office space in a squat red-brick building on Woodlawn near Marsh. There was a *No Smoking* sign in the elevator. Grey smoked anyway. Traynor kept his hands in his pockets and waited for the car to get to the fourth floor. The doors opened and a white-faced girl rushed up and asked them if they were the police. Grey said they were. The girl looked grateful.

"Right this way," she said. "Oh, it's so awful!"

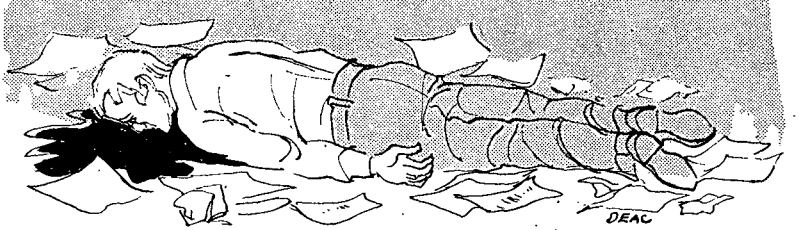
They entered an anteroom, with two offices leading from it. One door was marked *David Hofert,* another marked *James Jordan.* They went through the door marked *James Jordan.* Linda Haber was trembling. Grey took her by an arm and eased her toward a chair. Traynor studied the scene.

There was an old oak desk with papers strewn over it; some papers had spilled down onto the floor. There was a gun on the floor a little to the left of the desk, and somewhat farther to that side of the desk there was a man lying facedown in a pool of partially dried blood, some of which had spattered onto the papers.

Traynor said, "Mr. Jordan?"

"Mr. Hofert," the Haber girl said. "Is he—" She didn't finish the question. Her face paled and then she fainted.

by Lawrence Block



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Some lab people came and took pictures, noted measurements and made chalk marks. They had Hofert's body out of the building in less than half an hour. Grey and Traynor worked as a team, crisp and smooth and efficient. Traynor questioned the secretary when she came to, then had the medical examiner give her a sedative and commissioned a patrolman to drive her home. Grey routed the night elevator operator out of bed and asked him some questions. Traynor called the man who did the legal work for Hofert & Jordan. Grey got a prelim report from the M.E., pending autopsy results. Traynor bought two cups of coffee from a machine in the lobby and brought them upstairs. The coffee tasted of cardboard, from the containers.

"Almost too easy," Traynor said. "Too simple."

Grey nodded.

"At 6:45 last night the Haber kid went home. Jordan and Hofert were both here. Jordan stayed until eight. From six at night until eight in the morning nobody can get in or out of the building without signing the register, and the stairs are locked off at the second-floor landing. You have to sign and you have to use the elevator. Jordan signed out at eight. Hofert never signed out; he was dead."

"What was the time of death?"

"That fits, too. A rough estimate is twelve to fourteen hours. One bullet was in the chest a little below the heart. It took him a little while to die. Say five minutes, not much more than that. Enough time to lose a lot of blood."

"So if he got shot between seven and eight—"

"That's about it. No robbery motive. He has a full wallet on him. No suicide. He was standing up when he got shot, standing and facing the desk, Jordan's desk. The Haber girl couldn't have killed him. She left better than an hour before Jordan did and the sheet bears her out on that."

"Motive?"

Traynor put his coffee on the desk. "Maybe they hated each other," he said. "A little two-man operation jobbing office supplies. The lawyer says they didn't make much and they didn't lose much either. Partners for six years. Jordan's forty-four, Hofert was two years older. The secretary said they argued a lot."

"Everybody argues."

"They argued more. Especially yesterday, according to the secretary. There's a money motive, too. Partnership insurance."

Grey looked puzzled.

"Twin policies paid for out of partnership funds. Each partner is

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insured, with the face amount payable to the survivor if one of them dies."

"Why?"

"That's what I asked the lawyer. Look, suppose you and I are in business together. Then suppose you die—"

"Thanks."

"—and your wife inherits your share. She can't take a hand in the running of the business. After I pay myself a salary there's not much left in the way of profits for her. What she wants is the cash and what I want is full control of the business. Lots of friction."

"Maybe I'd better live," Grey said.

Traynor ignored him. "The insurance smooths things out. If you die, the insurance company pays me whatever the policy is. Then I have to use the money to buy your share of the business from your widow. She has the cash she needs, and I get the whole business without any cost to me. That way everybody's happy."

"Except me."

"Hofert & Jordan had partnership insurance," Traynor said. "Two policies, each with a face amount of a hundred grand. That's motive and means and opportunity, so pat it's hard to believe. I don't know what we're waiting around here for."

They didn't wait long. Half an hour later they picked up James Jordan at his home on Pattison. They asked him how come he hadn't gone to his office. He said he'd worked late the night before and wasn't feeling too well. They asked him why he had killed his partner. He stared at them and told them he didn't understand what they were talking about. They took him downtown and booked him for murder.

Hofert's widow lived in a ranch house just across the city line. The two kids were in school when Traynor and Grey got there. Mrs. Hofert was worried when she saw them. They told her as gently as you can tell a wife that someone has murdered her husband. A doctor came from down the block to give her a hypo, and an hour later she said she was ready to talk to them. She wasn't, really, but they didn't want to wait. It was a neat case, the kind you wrap up fast.

"That poor, poor man," she said. "He worked so hard. He worked and he worried and he wanted so very much to get ahead. He put his blood into that business. And now he's gone and nothing's left."

Grey started to light a cigarette, then changed his mind. Mrs. Hofert was crying quietly. Nobody

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said anything for a few minutes.

"I hardly ever saw him," she said. "Isn't that something? I hardly ever got to see him and now he's gone. So much work. And it wasn't for himself, nothing was ever for himself. He wanted money for us. For me, for the boys. As if we needed it. All we ever needed was him and now he's gone—"

Later, calmer, she said, "And he didn't leave us a thing. He was a gambler, Dave was. Oh, not cards or dice—not that kind of a gambler—stocks, the stock market. He made a decent living but that wasn't enough because he wanted more, he wanted a lot of money, and he tried to make it fast. He wanted to take risks in the business, to borrow money and expand. He had dreams. He always complained that Jim wouldn't let him build the business, that Jim was too conservative. So he took chances in the market, and at first he did all right, I think. He told me he did, and then everything fell in for him and . . . Oh, I don't understand anything!"

On the way downtown, Grey said, "Try it this way. Hofert went into Jordan's office last night. They'd been arguing off and on all day. He wanted to draw more money out of the company, or to borrow and expand, or anything. He was in terrible shape financially. The house was mortgaged to the roof. He'd already cashed in his personal insurance policies. He was in trouble, desperate. They argued again. Maybe he even threw a punch. The office was a mess, they could have been fighting a little. Then Jordan took out a gun and shot him. Right?"

"That's the only way it plays."

"Let's talk to Jordan again," Grey said.

They double-teamed Jordan and kept questions looping in at him until he had admitted almost everything. He admitted ownership of the gun, said he had bought it two years ago and had kept it in his desk ever since. He admitted quarreling with Hofert that afternoon and said that Hofert kept provoking arguments. He confirmed the secretary's statement about the time of her departure and the fact that he and Hofert had stayed alone in the office.

He denied killing Hofert.

"Why? Why would I do it?"

"You were fighting with him. Maybe he swung at you—"

"Dave? You're crazy. Why should he hit me?"

"Maybe he hated you. Maybe you hated each other. You shot him, panicked, and left. You couldn't face his corpse in the morning and you stayed home in

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bed until we came here for you."

"But I—"

"You stood to gain complete control of the business with him dead. All the profits instead of half, and no partner to get in your hair."

"Profits!" Jordan was shouting now. "I have enough! I have plenty!" He caught his breath, slowed down. "I'm a bachelor, I live alone, I save my money. Check my bank account. What do I want with blood money?"

"Hofert was deadweight. He was in hock up to his ears and he was giving you a bad time. You didn't plan on killing him, Jordan. You did it on the spur of the moment. He provoked it. And—"

"I did not kill David Hofert!"

"You admit it's your gun."

"Yes, damn it, it is my gun. I never fired it in my life. I never pointed it at anything. It was in my desk, in case I ever needed it—"

"And last night you needed it."

"No."

"Last night—"

"Last night I finished my work and went home," Jordan said. "I went home, I was tired, I had a headache. Dave stayed in the office. I told him I might not be in the next morning. 'Take it easy,' he said. That was the last thing he said to me. 'Take it easy.' "

Traynor and Grey looked at each other.

"He was alive when I left him."

"Then who killed him, Jordan? Who lured him into *your* office and took *your* gun and shot him in the chest and—"

They kept up the questions, kept hammering away like a properly efficient team. They got nowhere. Jordan never contradicted himself and never made very much sense. They kicked his story apart and he stayed with it anyway. After fifteen more minutes of getting nowhere they took him back to his cell and locked him away. Traynor stopped to stare at him, at the small round face peering out through the bars of the cage. Jordan looked trapped.

Two hours later, Traynor pushed a pile of papers to one side of his desk, eased his chair back and stood up. Grey asked him where he was going. "Out," Traynor told him.

"He said that Jim Jordan was trying to ruin him," Mrs. Hofert said. "I always felt . . . well, Dave felt persecuted sometimes. He had so many big plans that came to nothing. He thought the world was ganging up on him. I never believed that Jim would actually—"

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"We think it happened during an argument," Traynor told her. "Jordan got excited, didn't know exactly what he was doing. If he had planned to murder your husband he would have picked a brighter way to do it. But in the heat of an argument things happen in a hurry."

"The heat of an argument." She sat for a long time looking at nothing at all. Then she said, "I believe everything has a pattern, Mr. Traynor. Do you believe that?"

Traynor didn't answer.

"Dave's life—and his death, trying, struggling, working so very hard and getting every bad break there was. Getting bad breaks *because* he tried so hard, because he wasn't prudent about money. And then having everything build to a climax with everything going wrong at once. And the tragic ending, dying at what he could only have thought of as the worst possible moment. You see, all he wanted to do was provide for me and for the boys. He was . . . he was the kind of man who would have thought it a triumph to die well-insured." More long silence. "And not even that. A year ago, six months ago, all his policies were paid up. Then, as things went wrong, he cashed the policies to get money to recoup his losses, and lost that, too. And then the final irony of dying without anything to leave us but a legacy of debts. Do you see the pattern, Mr. Traynor?"

"I think so," Traynor said.

He got very busy then. He went to the lawyer he had spoken to earlier, went alone without Grey. He asked the lawyer some questions, went to an insurance man and asked more questions. He called the Haber girl, and with her he went over the few hours prior to Hofert's death. He got the autopsy results, the lab photos, the lab report. He went to the Hofert & Jordan office and stood in the room where Hofert had died, visualizing everything, running it through in his mind.

It was pushing six o'clock. He picked up a phone, called headquarters and got through to Grey. "Don't leave yet," he said. "I'll be right over. Stay put."

"You got something?"

"Yes," he said.

They were in a small cubbyhole office off the main room. Grey sat at a desk. Traynor stood up and did a lot of pacing.

"There were no fingerprints on the gun," he said.

"So? Jordan wiped it."

"Why?"

"Why? If you shot somebody,

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would you leave prints on the gun?"

Traynor walked over to the door, turned, came halfway back. "If I was going to wipe prints off a gun I would also do something about setting up an alibi," he said. "The way we've got it figured, Jordan killed strictly on impulse and reacted like a scared rabbit. He went for his gun, shot Hofert, ran out of the building and went home and stayed there shaking. He didn't sponge up blood, he didn't try to lug Hofert out of his office, didn't do a thing to disguise the killing. He left the gun right there, didn't try any of the tricks a panicky killer might try. But he wiped the prints off the gun."

"He must have been half out of his mind."

"It still doesn't add. There's another way, though, that does."

"Go on."

"Suppose you're Hofert. Now—"

"Why do we always have to suppose I'm the dead one?"

"Shut up," Traynor said. "Suppose you're David Hofert. You're deep in debt and you can't see your way clear. You look at yourself in the mirror and figure you're a failure. You want money for your wife, security for your kids. But you haven't got a penny, your insurance policies have lapsed, and your whole world is caving in on you. You're frantic."

"I don't—"

"Wait. You've always been a little paranoid. Now you think the whole world is after you and your partner is purposely trying to make things rough for you. You'd like to go and jump off a bridge, but that wouldn't get you anywhere. If you died in an accident, at least your wife and kids would get the hundred grand, the insurance dough which Jordan would turn over to them for your share of the business. Suicide voids that policy. If you kill yourself, they wind up with nothing."

Grey was nodding slowly now.

"But if your partner kills you—"

"What happens then?"

"It's a cute deal," Traynor said. "I went over it twice, with the lawyer and with the agent who wrote the policies. Now, each man is insured for a hundred grand, with that amount payable to the other or the other's heirs. If Jordan kills Hofert, he can't collect. You can't profit legally through the commission of a felony. But the insurance company still has to pay off. If the policy's paid up, and if it's been in force over two years, the company has to make it good. They can't hand the dough to Jordan if he's the killer, but they have to pay somebody."

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"Who? I don't understand you."

"The dead man's estate. Hofert's estate. It can't go to Jordan because he's the murderer, and it can't go to Jordan's heirs because he never has legal title to it to pass on. And the company can't keep it, so it can only go to Hofert's wife and kids."

Grey hesitated, then nodded.

"That's the only way Hofert's family ever gets a dime. They get that hundred thousand as insurance on Hofert's life, and they collect another hundred thousand when Jordan goes to the chair for murder, and they have at least half the business as well. All Hofert has to do is find a way to kill himself and make it look like murder, and he sends all that dough to them and has the satisfaction of sticking Jordan with a murder rap. We get the other kind all the time, the murders that are faked to look like suicides. This one went the opposite way."

"How did he do it?"

"The easiest way in the world," Traynor said. "He covered all bets, gave Jordan motive and means and opportunity. He argued with him all day in front of the secretary. He fixed it so that he and Jordan were alone in the office. When Jordan left, he went into Jordan's office and got Jordan's gun. He messed up the place to stage a struggle. He wrapped the gun in a tissue or something to keep his prints off it. He stood in front of the desk, off to the side, and he angled the shot so that it would look as though he'd been shot by somebody behind the desk. He shot himself in a spot that would be sure to kill him but that would leave him a minute or two of life to drop the gun in a convenient spot. That may have been accidental; maybe he aimed for the heart and missed. We'll never know."

"What does the lab say?"

Traynor shrugged. "Maybe and maybe no, as far as they're concerned. It could have been that way—that's as much as they can say, and that's enough. The paraffin test didn't show that Hofert had fired a gun, but it wouldn't, not if he had a tissue or a handkerchief around his hand. There were tissues on the floor, and a lot of papers that he could have used. The bullet trajectory fits well enough. It's something you don't think of right off the bat. The way Hofert had it planned, we weren't supposed to think of it at all. And it almost worked. It almost had Jordan nailed."

"Now what?"

Traynor looked at him. "Now we tell Jordan to relax," he said. "And after the inquest calls it sui-

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cide, we let him go—very simple."

"No," Grey said. "I don't believe it."

"Why not?"

"Because it's crazy. You don't kill yourself to stick somebody for murder. It's too damned iffy, anyway. Why did Jordan stay home that morning?"

"He was feeling sick."

"Sure. He didn't come in, he didn't even call his office. You can make a suicide theory out of it. You can also read it as a very clear-cut murder, and that's the way I'd read it. You want to let Jordan off and take a couple hundred thousand away from Hofert's wife. Is that right?"

"Yes." Traynor looked at the floor. "And you want to see Jordan in the chair for this one."

"That's the way it reads to me."

"Well, I won't go along with that, Phil."

"And I won't buy suicide. You fought this one because it was too simple, and now you've got us stuck with two answers, one easy and one tough, and I like the easy one and you like the tough one. I hope to hell Jordan confesses and makes it easy for us."

"He won't," Traynor said. "He's innocent."

"How sure are you?"

"Positive."

"That's how sure I am he's guilty. What do we do if he doesn't confess, if he sticks to his story and the lab can't cut it any finer for us? What do we do? Toss a coin?"

No one said anything for a few minutes. Traynor looked at his watch. Grey lit a cigarette.

Traynor said, "I don't buy murder."

"I don't buy suicide."

"He won't confess, Phil. And we'll never know. If Jordan goes on trial he'll get off because I'll hand my angle to his lawyer. He'll beat it. But we'll never know, not really. You'll always think he's guilty and I'll always think he isn't, and we'll never know."

"Maybe we ought to toss that coin."

"If we did," Traynor said, "it would stand on end. It's been that kind of a day."

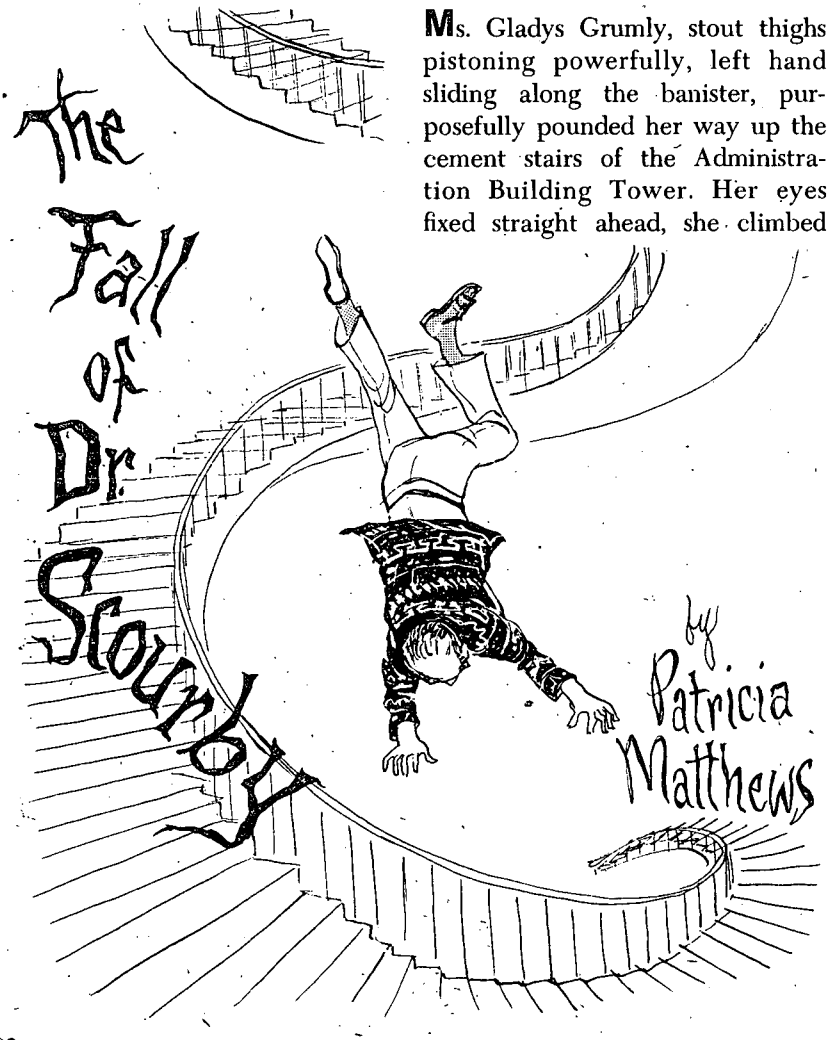


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'Tis a poor man, indeed, who would be turned from his course by the derision of another.

The Fall of Dr. Scourby

by Patricia Matthews



Ms. Gladys Grumly, stout thighs pistoning powerfully, left hand sliding along the banister, purposefully pounded her way up the cement stairs of the Administration Building Tower. Her eyes fixed straight ahead, she climbed

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close to the left side of the stairs. She was more than a little afraid of heights, and if she walked to the right, the terrifying vortex formed by the spiral staircase seemed to suck her eyes downward, until her mind crashed against the cold, hard square of concrete at the bottom.

Breathing deeply—good for the lungs—she approached the landing of the seventh floor. As she paused a moment to get her breath, she became aware of a sound from above her. She raised her eyes to a blur of motion. Before her nearsighted gaze could register what she was seeing, something plummeted past her line of vision. It took a moment for her mind to identify the "something" as a human body. As her mind registered this fact, it also registered the sound of a heavy object hitting the cement square, seven floors below.

Ms. Grumly prided herself on the fact that she was a strong, healthy woman, who had never fainted in her life. Ms. Grumly fainted now.

It was 1:15 p.m. Mark Cassidy, chief investigator for the campus police at State University, looked at the report in front of him and sighed wearily. He pulled out his desk drawer and rummaged for cigarettes, before he remembered that he had quit the nasty habit. He slammed the drawer shut, and took a roll of candy out of his pocket. Putting one of the candies in his mouth, he pulled the report toward him: a motorcycle stolen from Lot B; obscene words on the walls of the men's room in the Science Building; a doodle-dasher in the library, and some minor vandalism at the Martin Hall escalator—a usual day's activities.

He became conscious of the sharp sting of heartburn in the pit of his stomach. He should not have had the enchiladas at the cafeteria; or maybe, as his doctor had suggested, it was the job. There were certainly enough aggravations to ruin a man's digestion.

The door to his office slammed back loudly, and he looked up as Sue Collins, the desk clerk, burst in and then stood white-faced in his doorway, as if unable to go farther. She opened her mouth, but it was a moment before the words came out.

"Mr. Cassidy! Mr. Cassidy! Someone has . . . Someone is . . ."

Cassidy got up from his desk quickly and pushed past the girl, who now seemed incapable of movement as well as coherent speech.

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As he entered the other room, he saw the rest of the staff hovering over and around a stout, pained-looking woman, who seemed familiar to him.

Sergeant Walters stepped forward. "This is Miss Grumly, Mark. She works in Accounting. She was returning from lunch, going up the tower stairs, when she saw a man fall from the eighth-floor landing."

Cassidy felt his gut tighten. He was already moving toward the door, giving orders. "Walters, get a blanket and come with me. Sue, you and Margaret stay with Miss Grumly. Don't let her leave until I talk with her."

Cassidy had seen more than a few dead bodies in his time, but that had been a few years back. Campus police work had left him strangely unprepared for the sight of this one. With something of an effort, he made himself look at the body professionally. The body was male, Caucasian, with thinning brown hair worn just past collar length, and bushy sideburns. He was wearing cream-colored pants, a white shirt with Mexican-designed trim, brown sandals and red socks. The man had landed on his back, and Cassidy recognized Dr. Daniel Scourby, head of the Drama Department.

Suddenly Cassidy became conscious that a vast, cumulative whisper was coming down from above him, like the susurration in a giant seashell. Looking up, he could see tier upon tier of white faces peering over the banisters of the stairway as it coiled up to the eighth floor.

"Put the blanket over him," he said to Walters. The other man lifted the blanket and gingerly placed it over the body.

Lt. Leo Moreno, of Homicide, sat on the edge of Cassidy's desk as if he belonged there. He was a stocky man, with a smooth, tanned face, and sharp, blue eyes.

"Hi, Cassidy. Your chief tells me that you've got a little trouble here. I understand that one of your profs took a dive from the eighth floor of the stairwell."

Cassidy nodded. "That's about it."

"Jumped, fell, or pushed?"

Cassidy sighed. "I don't know yet, Leo. I was just going to talk to the only witness."

"Want us to take over? You know, this is a little different than somebody ripping off a bicycle, or demonstrating in the dean's office."

Cassidy tried to keep his voice calm. "I know that, Leo. After all, I do have some experience with this type of thing. You never seem

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to remember, but I spent ten years on a city police force."

"Yeah. I do keep forgetting that. Well, suit yourself. But if you find you can't handle it, don't forget to give us a call. We're pretty busy right now, but we can always find time to help out a brother officer."

Cassidy watched Moreno leave the room. He sure had the needle out. Cassidy knew that the city police had a patronizing view of the campus force. There *had* been a time when campus police were little more than traffic cops and guards, but now they had a real force, and men with good backgrounds in law enforcement who were authorized to handle any crime that occurred on campus, and Cassidy, as investigator, was involved in almost all of them.

Cassidy hesitated a moment. He was anxious to talk to the witness, Gladys Grumly, but maybe he should talk to his chief first.

Chief Baker was a big man, heavy-shouldered and crag-faced. He looked up from his desk as Cassidy entered the room.

"Oh, hello, Cassidy. I heard that you've been talking to Moreno. That son-of-a-gun is like a genie, the way he pops up. I still don't know how he found out about this thing so fast."

"The lieutenant has good connections," Cassidy said, "but listen, I want first crack at this. I know this case is a little bigger than the ones that usually come up on campus, and I know Homicide will start putting pressure on us if the case isn't tied up quickly, but first give me a couple of days on my own. All right?"

Baker looked at him and shrugged. "All right, Cassidy. You're a good man. Take your best shot."

Cassidy left his office to question Ms. Grumly.

She was determined to be a good witness. Cassidy could tell by the determined look in her eye, and the controlled set of her face. Only a slight tic in her right eyelid, and the pulse throbbing in her sturdy throat, indicated her nervousness.

Cassidy leaned toward her, trying for the right blend of respect and solicitude.

"Now, Miss Grumly, I know it's difficult for you to talk about what has happened, but—"

"*Ms.* Grumly, if you please, Mr. Cassidy." Ms. Grumly's tone was cool, and so were her eyes.

"Of course," Cassidy said smoothly. "Ms. Grumly. Now, we need your help. As the only witness, your testimony is very important."

Ms. Grumly's stern expression

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softened a bit. "I will do my duty."

"Good. Now, tell me just what you saw and heard before Dr. Scourby fell."

"I was just coming to the seventh-floor landing. I stopped for a moment to rest, and as I stopped, I heard this funny sound above me."

"A funny sound? Just what kind of a sound was it?"

A frown creased Ms. Grumly's ample forehead. "Why, just a sound, a noise."

"Think about it. What was it like?"

Ms. Grumly's gaze turned inward. "Well, it sounded a little like a cough, or a grunt. I'm sorry to be so vague, but it was not a sound I am accustomed to hearing."

"And after you heard the sound?"

"I looked up to see where it came from. I saw something on the eighth-floor landing; a movement."

"A movement?"

Ms. Grumly's wide cheeks pinked. "I don't see very well without my glasses, Mr. Cassidy. All I could see was what appeared to be two people moving about on the landing, and as I looked up, one of them went over the railing."

Her face went pale at the memory, and for an instant she lost her composure. Cassidy realized he could get nothing more from her at the moment.

"Thank you, Ms. Grumly. You've been a big help. If you remember anything else, about the sound you heard, for instance, let me know at once, will you?"

She nodded, and the color began to come back into her face.

"Oh, there is one thing more. How did you happen to be using the stairs instead of the elevator?"

She looked at him with great disdain. "I always take the stairs. Exercise! If more people around here used the stairs, and their legs, they'd be in much better condition."

Not Scourby, Cassidy thought wryly, and she must have read his mind, because her face flushed a dark and unbecoming red.

Dr. Daniel Scourby, Cassidy soon discovered, had not been the best-liked member of the drama faculty. A flamboyant and volatile man, long on temperament, and short on good manners, he managed to alienate most of his colleagues and a good number of his students with his egotism and cruelty. Despite these traits, however, he had been quite a man with the ladies, and was well known on campus for his numerous love affairs.

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Cassidy learned that Dr. Scourby had been in the accounting office on the eighth floor shortly before his death. He had gone there to pick up a travel check. The check had not been ready, and with his usual patience and charm, he had caused a scene. His visit to the accounting office was well remembered. Elsie Smith, who had waited on him and borne the brunt of his anger, verified that he left the office at 1:00 p.m. She remembered the time, because he had kept her fifteen minutes past her lunch break.

Ms. Grumly had seen Scourby fall at about 1:10 p.m. Cassidy was unable to turn up anyone who had seen Scourby during those last ten minutes. Too, Cassidy wondered why Scourby had taken the stairs. He thought about the eighth-floor landing. He had found nothing there to help him, no physical clues that might show him what had happened there. The railing was sturdy, and approximately waist-high. Scourby was not a tall man, but he was heavy-bodied and broad-shouldered. It would not be an easy job to force a man of his size and weight over the railing.

Cassidy sighed. There simply was no physical evidence to go on. On the other hand, he had more than enough suspects. Almost everyone on campus had disliked Scourby, and more than a few people actively hated the man.

Cassidy was acutely conscious of the passage of time. He could almost feel Moreno leaning over his shoulder, waiting for him to admit that he couldn't get it all together. Well, damn Moreno! He *would* get it together.

He ran his mind down the list of people who might have the best reason to hate Scourby. Cassidy had determined that Scourby had two ex-wives, but they were both remarried, and lived out of state. There were no children, and evidently no other living relatives. That pretty much ruled out his family.

From what Cassidy had been able to learn, the man had few friends outside of the campus community. Like many academicians, the main thrust of his life seemed to revolve around the campus. Despite his general unpopularity, he was very active in the life of the university in general, and in his own department in particular.

Since the incident had occurred on campus, it seemed logical to Cassidy that whoever had been with Scourby on that landing was also from the campus. It also seemed logical that the most

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likely suspects were in Scourby's own department: Dr. Linus Martin, the man whom Scourby had climbed over in his race for the chairmanship of the department; Ben Aldon, student, actor, who had publicly stated that he hated Scourby's guts because of a co-ed's suicide and would like to see him hanged from a certain portion of his anatomy; Melissa Jackson, student, actress, part-time student assistant. It was general knowledge that she'd had an affair with Scourby. It had ended badly, and she had taken it hard. There must be others, too, who hated Scourby, but whose reasons were not public knowledge.

Cassidy sat in the fifth row of the darkened theater, his eyes fixed on the two young people on stage. The young man was tall, athletic-looking, and ruggedly handsome. The girl was also tall, and very beautiful.

Ben Aldon and Melissa Jackson were starring in the Drama Department production of *Picnic*, which was being directed by Linus Martin. The kids were good.

A slight figure entered stage right. Cassidy knew this was Jimmie Breen, Scourby's girl Friday in the drama office. Cassidy had not been able to find out how she felt about Scourby. From all accounts, she did her job well, and stood up under Scourby's little attacks of sadism with commendable aplomb. She was an excellent actress. Cassidy, who usually attended all of the drama productions with his girlfriend Maryann, had seen her in many other productions. She was a thin, childlike girl, with pale androgynous features.

Thinking of the other productions he had attended made Cassidy think of Maryann. If Scourby hadn't gotten himself killed, Cassidy would be with her right now, in her comfortable apartment, having a nice cold bourbon, and a good warm meal, and a little comfort, instead of here, in a stuffy theater, in the dark.

Ben Aldon was his first target during a break. Aldon's young face was flushed, and his eyes were hot.

"Yes!" he said. "I hated Scourby, and I had good reason. Cindy Purdom was one sweet kid, before he got his hands on her. Scourby messed up her mind with pot and fast talk. Told her he would make her a big star. Of course I resented his taking her away from me, but that wasn't the reason I hated him. I hated him because when he had used her, he threw her out. She was never the same after that. It was

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only a month later that she took the pills. Yeah, I felt like wasting him, but I didn't, and I have an alibi. I was with Melissa. Neither of us has classes on Tuesday afternoons, and we were over at her pad going over our lines until about 3:00 p.m."

Cassidy looked at him mildly. "I don't suppose you have any other witnesses. Someone at the apartment house who saw you together?"

Aldon looked back at him sullenly, but his eyes were uneasy.

"No, at least I don't think so. You check it out. You're the cop!"

"I will, son, I will."

Aldon muttered something under his breath and moved away. Cassidy sighed. If the regular police got little respect from today's youth, a campus policeman got less.

Melissa Jackson corroborated Aldon's story. She admitted that she still hated Scourby, and was glad that he was dead, but she had been with Ben Aldon at the time, and under the circumstances he had described.

Cassidy looked at her appraisingly. She was a big girl; tall, lithe, and strong. Was she strong enough to have pushed Scourby over the stair railing?

After talking to Melissa, Cassidy talked with Dr. Linus Martin, a tall, narrow-shouldered man, with pale, defenseless-looking eyes. He rubbed at them wearily as he talked to Cassidy.

"Sure, I hated Scourby. I and several dozen other people. But kill him? He's done enough to me without my letting him drive me to murder. I was in my office from 12:00 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. Jimmie Breen, the drama secretary, can verify that. We've been having some rather late rehearsals, and I was bushed."

Cassidy talked last with Jimmie Breen. Her large, waif's eyes looked much too big for her narrow little face.

"Yes, Dr. Martin was in his office from 12:00 p.m. until about 1:00 p.m. and I was in the office until 2:00 p.m. No, I don't think anyone else saw me. At least I didn't see anyone myself. It was pretty quiet around here during the middle of the day."

Cassidy studied her child's face. "How did you feel toward Dr. Scourby, Jimmie?"

She lowered her eyelids, but her face did not change expression.

"Like everyone else, I suppose. He wasn't a very likable man. He was hard to work for; a real male chauvinist. Then, after what he did to Cindy . . . We were roommates you know, Cindy and I. We shared an apartment. After what

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happened to her, I could never feel friendly toward him."

"Why did you stay in this job?" Cassidy asked gently.

She shrugged her narrow shoulders. "I have to work to get through college. This job is convenient, being right here in the department. I could put up with Scourby. I just didn't let him get to me."

Cassidy resisted a desire to pat her shoulder. As he left, he was thinking that Scourby had certainly gotten to someone, and that someone had in turn, really gotten to him.

Cassidy returned to the office. Only young Thompson was there; the rest of the night shift were out making rounds. Cassidy waved a weary greeting to Thompson, and went into his inner office.

He picked up the coffeepot and shook it. There was some left, but it smelled strong and stale. He decided that, at the very least, he deserved some fresh coffee. He cleaned the pot and filled it with fresh water. It had been a long day, and his mind was growing sluggish with fatigue.

The faces of the people to whom he had talked kept passing before his mind's eye like the faces in a police lineup. Any one of them had sufficient motive, and none of them had an ironclad alibi. If only Ms. Grumly had been wearing her glasses . . . If only she could better describe that strange sound heard on the landing above her . . .

The thought of that sound tantalized Cassidy. He could do nothing now about Ms. Grumly's nearsightedness, but if he could discover what the sound was, or who had made it, he might be on his way to Scourby's murderer.

He unwrapped the sandwich he had purchased from the vending machine, and poured a cup of the fresh coffee. He really ought to relax for a moment. His mind was going over the same things again and again.

He reached over and turned on the small television set that he kept on the corner of his desk.

There wasn't anything decent on. It was summer, and all that was playing, even during prime time, was reruns. He switched through an ancient variety show, an even older mystery, a Japanese Western, with lots of violence and bad dubbing, and a space opera. He moved his fingers to turn off the set, then switched around the dial once again as he suddenly realized what he had just seen and heard. He watched the program he had turned to for several minutes, tapping his fingers thoughtfully on the arm of his chair.

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Again he turned off the set. He had a plan.

The Personnel Office was closed, but Cassidy simply let himself in. He knew where the faculty records were kept, and it did not take him long to locate Dr. Linus Martin's file. He read the material thoroughly, replaced the file, then called the Records Office.

Mrs. McIntosh, the assistant registrar, was none too happy when Cassidy arrived at her office a short time later.

"You just caught me," she snapped. "I was about to go home. Been working late every night. This quarter system is murder."

"I won't be long," Cassidy soothed. "I need to see the schedules of classes for three students: Ben Aldon, Jimmie Breen, and Melissa Jackson."

Mrs. McIntosh grumbled, but she brought the records quickly enough, and sat watching Cassidy as he went over each of them carefully.

When he was finished, he smiled at her. "Thanks."

"Well, I hope that you found what you were looking for."

He smiled again. "I think maybe I did."

He waited until Mrs. McIntosh had locked the office, then left the administration building and headed back toward the theater.

He had looked at four sets of records, including Dr. Martin's. Only one of them had the information for which he had been looking. Alone, it didn't mean a thing. Just a hunch, but maybe, just maybe, he could use that hunch as leverage.

The light was still on in the theater, and when he went inside, he saw that rehearsals were still going on. Both Ben Aldon and Melissa looked tired, and Linus Martin, sitting in the back of the theater, looked up wearily as Cassidy came in.

"Almost through," he said softly. "Along about this stage of the game, you begin wondering how it will ever come together, but it does. It does. Do you want to ask more questions? If you do, I warn you that we are all too tired to make sense."

Cassidy shook his head. "No more questions. At least not tonight. I'm just going to nose around a little."

Martin nodded tiredly, and slumped back into his seat. On stage, the two young people had finished their scene. Cassidy walked through the door at the side of the stage, and made his way over the ropes and props to the back.

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Jimmie Breen was there, busily painting a portion of a picket fence. She turned at the sound of Cassidy's footsteps.

"You're working late tonight, Jimmie."

She looked up at him seriously. "So are you, Mr. Cassidy. But I guess there's no law against that, for either of us."

"None at all. Jimmie, I wonder if you would come with me to Dr. Scourby's office?"

She looked at him warily. "Why?"

"I'll tell you when we get there."

She put down the paintbrush, wiped her hands on her jeans, and turned toward him. Cassidy turned his back to her and began leading the way toward Scourby's office. When he had gone about ten feet, he whirled, as quickly as he could, raised his arm, and lunged toward the girl.

He had a vision of round, startled eyes, a white face, and then a good picture of the ceiling, as he landed hard on his back, dazed but intact.

He could hear the sound of running footsteps, and the sound of the girl's ragged breathing, but before that, he had heard something else—the sound for which he had been listening; a funny sound, like a cough, or a grunt, or a judo *kiai*; the sound made as part of a judo move.

It was hard to hate her for it, Cassidy decided. Sitting there in the chair in his office, she looked more like a war orphan than a murderess.

"How did you know it was me?" she asked softly.

"I didn't know for sure. We have a witness who heard a strange sound, a sound that could have been a *kiai*. I checked Dr. Martin's, Melissa's, Ben's and your records. Yours were the only ones that showed any experience in the martial arts—two years of judo classes."

She shook her head. "I didn't mean to do it. I mean, I didn't plan it. After Cindy, I promised myself that I would get even with him some way. But I didn't plan it. It just happened."

She looked up, her dark eyes wide. Her hands fumbled in her lap like two lost things.

"Cindy and I were . . . We were very close. He just the same as killed her, you know."

Cassidy said softly, "What happened? What happened today, Jimmie?"

She swallowed, and made an attempt to focus on his questions. "He asked me to call about his travel check. Accounting said that

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it wasn't ready. He gave me a bad time about that, as if it were my fault. He said he was going over there himself, and straighten things out.

"After he left, I found the papers on his desk. He hadn't submitted them, and that's why the check wasn't ready. I thought I had better get them over to the accounting office before he tore the place apart . . ."

"So you left the office, and went to the Administration Building."

"Yes. I was in a hurry, so I went around back of the cafeteria. I didn't meet anyone I recognized. I took the elevator up to the eighth floor, but I was too late. Dr. Scourby was already coming out of the accounting office. He started swearing at me, and suddenly I just couldn't handle it. I ran for the stairs, but he followed me. I ran down the steps to the first landing and turned. He was coming down the steps toward me. All I could think of was how much I hated him. He kept on coming toward me and I . . ."

In one fluid motion, she rose from the chair and twisted her upper body as she lifted her right shoulder. Cassidy had a vivid mental picture of Scourby pitching over her shoulder into the stairwell.

There was a long silence, broken finally by the sound of a strident, feminine voice in the outer office, then the sound of Walters' baritone attempting to override it.

Walters opened the door and stuck his head in. "It's Ms. Grumly, Cassidy. She says she's got to talk to you."

Cassidy looked at Jimmie. Then he reached over and patted her shoulder.

In the outer office, Ms. Grumly stood, pink-cheeked and glowing with self-satisfaction.

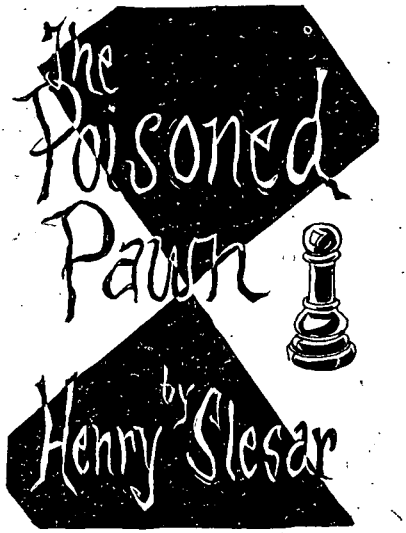
"I told him that you said to contact you if I thought of anything else, and I have," she said triumphantly. "That sound, the sound I heard on the landing? Well, tonight, I was watching an old movie on television . . ."

Cassidy sighed wearily as his stomach twinged painfully.



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If it weren't for the state of his own health (his stomach felt lined with broken green bottle glass), Milo Bloom would have giggled at the sight of his roommate in the six-bed ward on the third floor of Misercordia Hospital. Both of his arms were in casts, giving them the appearance of two chubby white sausages; the left arm dangled from a pulley in a complex traction arrangement that somehow included his left leg. Later, he learned that his companion (Dietz was his name), had fallen from a loading platform. Milo's hospital admittance record told a far more dramatic story. He had been poisoned.

"And I'll tell you something," Milo said, shaking his head sadly and making the broken glass jiggle, "I learned a lesson from it. I was lying under my own dining table, and my whole life flashed in front of my eyes, and you know what it looked like? One long chess game. I saw myself born on QB4, a white pawn wrapped in a baby blanket, and here I was, dying, caught in a *zugzwang* and about to be checkmated . . ."

Of course, Milo was still under sedation and wasn't expected to talk coherently. An hour later, however, he was able to express himself more clearly.

"Never again," he said solemnly. "Never, never again will I play another game of chess. I'll never touch another piece, never read another chess column. You say the name 'Bobby Fischer' to me, I'll put my hands over my ears. For thirty years I was a pris-

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oner of that miserable board, but now I'm through. You call that a game? That's an obsession! And look where it got me. Just look!"

What he really meant, of course, was "listen," which is what Dietz, who had no other plans that day, was perfectly willing to do.

My father cared very little about chess. When he proudly displayed me to the membership of the Greenpoint Chess Club, and mockingly promoted a match with Kupperman, its champion, it wasn't for love of the game; just hate for Kupperman. I was eleven years old, Kupperman was forty-five. The thought of my tiny hands strangling Kupperman's King filled him with ecstasy.

I sat opposite Kupperman's hulking body and ignored the heavy-jowled sneer that had terrified other opponents, confident that I was a prodigy, whose ability Kupperman would underestimate. Then zip! wham! thud! the pieces came together in the center of the board. Bang! Kupperman's Queen lashed out in an unorthodox early attack. *Whoosh!* came his black Knights in a double assault that made me whimper. Then *crash!* my defense crumpled and my King was running for his life, only to fall dead ignobly at the feet of a Rook Pawn. Unbelievable. In seventeen moves, most of them textbook-defying, Kupperman had crushed me. Guess who didn't get ice cream that night?

Of course, I was humiliated by Kupperman's victory. I had bested every opponent in my peer group, and thought I was ready for prodigy-type encounters. I didn't realize at the time how very good Kupperman was. The fact that he was Number One in a small Brooklyn chess club gave no real measure of the man's talent, his extraordinary, Petrosian-like play.

I learned a great deal more about that talent in the next two decades, because that wasn't the last Bloom-Kupperman match; it was only the first of many.

Kupperman refused to play me again until four years later, when I was not only a ripe fifteen, but had already proved my worth by winning the Junior Championship of Brooklyn. I was bristling with self-confidence then, but when I faced the 49-year-old Kupperman across the table, and once again witnessed the strange, slashing style, the wild romping of his Knights, the long-delayed castling, the baffling retreat of well-developed pieces, surprising *zwischenzuge*—in-between moves with no apparent purpose—and most dis-

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turbing of all, little stabbing moves of his Pawns, pinpricks from both sides of the board, nibbling at my presumably solid center, panic set in and my brain fogged over, to say nothing of my glasses from the steam of my own accelerated breathing. Yes, I lost that game, too; but it wasn't to be my last loss to Kupperman, even though he abruptly decided to leave not only the Greenpoint Chess Club, but the East Coast itself.

I never knew for certain why Kupperman decided to leave. My father theorized that he was an asthma victim who had been advised to bask in the drying sunshine of Arizona or some other western state. Actually, the first postmark I saw from a Kupperman correspondence was a town called Kenton, Illinois. He had sent a letter to the Greenpoint Chess Club, offering to play its current champion by mail. I suppose he was homesick for Brooklyn. Now, guess who was current champion? Milo Bloom.

I was twenty-two then, past the age of prodigy, but smug in my dominance of the neighborhood *potzers*, and pantingly eager to face the Kupperman unorthodoxy again, certain that nobody could break so many rules and still come out on top consistently. I replied to Kupperman at once, special delivery no less, and told him with becoming modesty of my ascension in the club and my gracious willingness to play him by mail.

A week later, I received his reply, a written scowl is what it was, and an opening move—N-KB3! Obviously, Kupperman hadn't changed too much in the intervening seven years.

Well, I might as well get it over with and admit that Kupperman defeated me in that game and, if anything, the defeat was more shattering than the head-to-head encounters of the past. Incredibly, Kupperman posted most of his pieces on the back rank. Then came a Knight sacrifice, a pinned Queen, and a neatly-executed check.

Foreseeing the slaughter ahead, I resigned, despite the fact that I was actually ahead by one Pawn.

Obviously, my early resignation didn't fully satisfy Kupperman (I could just visualize him, his unshaven cheeks quivering in a fleshy frown, as he tore open my letter and growled in chagrin at my reply). Almost the next day, I received a letter asking me why I hadn't sent my White opening for the next game.

I finally did: P-Q4. He replied with N-KB3. I moved my own

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Knight. He responded by moving his Pawn to the Queen's third square. I moved my Knight to the Bishop's third square, and he promptly pinned it with *his* Bishop, contrary to all common sense. Then he proceeded to let me have both Bishops and bring up my Queen. I should have known that I was doomed then and there. He smothered my Bishops, made an aggressive castling move, and needled me with Pawns until my position was hopeless.

A month went by before Kupperman sent me the next opening move (this time, his letter was postmarked Tyler, Kansas) and we were launched into the third game of what was to become a lifetime of humiliating encounters.

Yes, that's correct. *I never won a game from Kupperman.* Yet, despite my continuing chagrin and, one might think, despite Kupperman's boredom, our games-by-mail were played for a period of *nineteen years.* The only real variations were in Kupperman's postmarks; he seemed to change his residence monthly. Otherwise the pattern remained the same: Kupperman's unorthodox, Petrosian-like style invariably bested my solid, self-righteous, textbook game. As you can imagine, beating Kupperman became the primary challenge, then, of my life.

Then he sent me The Letter.

It was the first time Kupperman's correspondence consisted of anything but chess notations. It was postmarked from New Mexico, and the handwriting looked as if it had been scrawled out with a screwdriver dipped in axle grease.

"Dear Grandmaster," it said, with heavy irony. *"Please be advised that the present score is 97 games to nothing. Please be advised that upon my hundredth victory, we play no more. Yours respectfully, A. Kupperman."*

I don't know how to describe the effect of that letter upon me. I couldn't have been more staggered if my family doctor had diagnosed a terminal illness. Yes, I knew full well that the score was 97-to-0, although I hadn't realized that Kupperman kept such scrupulous records; but the humiliation that lay ahead of me, the hundredth defeat, the *final* defeat, was almost too much for me to bear. Suddenly, I knew that if I didn't beat Kupperman at least *once* before that deadline, my life would be lived out in shame and total frustration.

It was no use returning to the textbooks; I had studied thousands of games (*all* of Petrosian's, until I knew each move by rote) without

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finding the secret of overcoming Kupperman's singular style. If anything, his use of Knights and Pawns was even wilder and more distinctive than Petrosian's. It was no use hoping for a sudden failure of Kupperman's play; not with only three games left. In fact, it was no use believing in miracles of any kind.

I walked about in a daze, unable to decide whether to send Kupperman the opening move of the 98th game. My employer (the accounting firm of Bernard & Yerkes) began to complain bitterly about frequent errors in my work. The young woman I had been dating for almost two years took personal affront at my attitude and severed our relationship.

Then, one day, the solution to my problem appeared almost magically before my eyes.

Strangely enough, I had seen the very same advertisement in *Chess Review* for almost a dozen years, and it never assumed the significance it did that evening.

The advertisement read: *"Grandmaster willing to play for small fee, by mail. Guaranteed credentials. Fee returned in case of draw or mate. Yankovich, Box 87."*

I had never been tempted to clash with any other player by mail, except Kupperman; I had certainly never been willing to lose money in such encounters.

I stared at the small print of the advertisement, and my brain seemed flooded with brilliant light. It was as if a voice, a basso profundo voice, was speaking to me and saying: Why not let someone *else* beat Kupperman?

The simple beauty of the idea thrilled me, and completely obliterated all ethical doubts. Who said chess was a game of ethics, anyway? Chess players are notorious for their killer instincts. Half the sport lay in rattling your opponent. Who can deny the malevolent effects of Fischer's gamesmanship on Boris Spassky? Yes, this would be different; this would be a blatant falsehood. If I gained a victory, it would be a false one; but if I could beat Kupperman, even a phantom victory would do.

That night I addressed a letter to the grandmaster's box number, and within two days received a reply. Yankovich's fee was a mere twenty-five dollars, he wrote. He required the money in advance, but promised to return it after the conclusion of the game, in the event of a draw or a defeat. He wished me luck, and on the assumption that I would be interested, sent me his opening move: P-Q4.

With a feeling of rising excitement, I sent off two letters

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that day. One to Yankovich, Box 87, and one to A. Kupperman in New Mexico. The letter to Yankovich contained twenty-five dollars, and a brief note explaining that I would send my countermove by return mail. The letter to Kupperman was briefer. It merely said: *"P-Q4."*

Within two days, I had Kupperman's reply: *"N-KB3."*

I wasted no time in writing to Yankovich. *"N-KB3,"* my letter said.

Yankovich was equally prompt. *"N-KB3,"* he said.

I wrote Kupperman. *"N-KB3."*

Kupperman replied: *"P-B4."*

I wrote Yankovich. *"P-B4."*

By the sixth move, Yankovich-Bloom's Bishop had captured Kupperman's Knight, and Kupperman's King's Pawn took possession of our Bishop. (I had begun to think of the White forces as *ours*.) True to form, Kupperman *didn't* capture toward the center. This fact seemed to give Yankovich pause, because his next letter arrived two days later than usual. He responded with a Pawn move, as did Kupperman, who then gave up a Pawn. I felt a momentary sense of triumph, which was diminished a dozen moves later when I realized that Kupperman, once again poising his pieces on the *back* rank, was up to his old tricks. I fervently hoped that Grandmaster Yankovich wouldn't be as bemused by this tactic as I was.

Unfortunately, he was. It took Kupperman forty moves to beat him into submission, but after battering at Yankovich-Bloom's King side, he suddenly switched his attack to the Queen's, and . . . *we* had to resign.

Believe me, I took no pleasure in the letter Yankovich sent me, congratulating me on my victory and returning my twenty-five dollars.

Nor was there much pleasure in the grudging note that Kupperman penned in his screwdriver style to the bottom of his next missive, which read: *"Good game. P-K4."*

I decided, however, that the experiment was worth continuing. Perhaps Yankovich had simply been unprepared for so unorthodox a style as Kupperman's. Surely, in the next round he would be much warier. So I returned the twenty-five dollars to Box 87, and sent Yankovich my opening move: *"P-K4."*

Yankovich took an extra day to respond with P-K3.

I don't know how to describe the rest of that game. Some chess games almost defy description. Their sweep and grandeur can

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only be compared to symphonies, or epic novels. Yes, that would be more appropriate to describe my 99th game with Kupperman. (By the fourteenth move, I stopped calling it Yankovich-Bloom, and simply thought of it as "mine.")

The game was full of plots and counterplots, much like the famous Bogoljubow-Alekhine match at Hastings in 1922. As we passed the fortieth move, with neither side boasting a clear advantage, I began to recognize that even if my next-to-last game with Kupperman might not be a victory, it would be no less than a Draw.

Finally, on the fifty-first move, an obviously admiring Yankovich offered the Draw to Kupperman-Bloom. In turn, I offered it to Kupperman, and waited anxiously for his rejection or acceptance.

Kupperman wrote back: *"Draw accepted."* He added, in a greasy postscript, *"Send opening move to new address—Box 991, General Post Office, Chicago, Ill."*

My heart was pounding when I addressed my next letter to Yankovich, asking him to retain the twenty-five dollars, and to send me *his* White move for what was to be my final match—with Yankovich, with Kupperman, or with anyone else.

Yankovich replied with a P-K4.

I wrote to Kupperman, and across the top of the page, I inscribed the words: *"Match No. 100—P-K4."*

Kupperman answered with an identical move, and the Last Battle was joined.

Then a strange thing happened. Despite the fact that I was still the intermediary, the shadow player, the very existence of Yankovich began to recede in my mind. Yes, the letters continued to arrive from Box 87, and it was Yankovich's hand still inscribing the White moves, but now each move seemed to emanate from my own brain, and Yankovich seemed as insubstantial as Thought itself. In the Chess Journal of my mind, this one-hundredth match would be recorded forever as Bloom vs. Kupperman, win, lose or draw.

If the previous match had been a masterpiece, this one was a monument.

I won't claim it was the greatest chess game ever played, but for its sheer wild inventiveness, its incredible twists and turns, it was unmatched in either my experience or my reading.

If anything, Kupperman was out-Petrosianing Petrosian in the daring mystery of his maneuvers. Like a Petrosian-Spassky game I particularly admired, it was impossible to see a truly decisive se-

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ries of moves until thirty plays had been made, and suddenly, two glorious armies seemed opposed to each other on the crest of a mountain. With each letter in my mailbox, the rhythm of my heartbeats accelerated, until I began to wonder how I could bear so much suspense—suspense *doubled* by virtue of receiving both sides of the game from the two battling champions, one of whom I had completely identified as myself. Impatiently, I waited to see how *I* was going to respond to Kupperman's late castling, how *I* was going to defend against his romping Knights, how *I* was going to withstand the pinpricks of his Pawns.

Then it happened.

With explosive suddenness, there were four captures of major pieces, and only Pawns and Rooks and Kings remained in action. Then, my King moved against both Kupperman's Rook and Pawn, and Kupperman saw the inevitable.

He resigned.

Yes, you can imagine my sense of joy and triumph and fulfillment. I was so elated that I neglected to send my own resignation to Yankovich; not that he required formal notification. Yankovich, however, was gracious to his defeated foe, not realizing that my defeat was actually victory. He wrote me a letter, congratulating me on the extraordinary game I had played against him, and while he could not return the twenty-five dollar fee according to the rules of our agreement, he *could* send me a fine bottle of wine to thank me for a most rewarding experience.

The wine was magnificent. It was a Chateau Latour, '59. I drank it all down with a fine dinner-for-one in my apartment, not willing to share this moment with anyone. I recall toasting my invisible chess player across the table, and that was the last thing I recalled. The next thing I saw was the tube of a stomach pump.

No, there wasn't any way I could help the police locate Yankovich. He was as phantomlike as I had been myself. The name was a pseudonym, the box number was abandoned after the wine had been dispatched to me, and the review could provide no clues to the identity of the box holder. The reason for his poisoning attempt was made clear only when Kupperman himself read that I was hospitalized, and wrote me a brief letter of explanation.

Yankovich's real name was Schlagel, Kupperman said. Forty years ago, Schlagel and Kupperman (his name, too, was an

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alias) had been cell mates in a Siberian prison. They had made five years pass more swiftly by playing more than two thousand games of chess. Schlagel had the advantage when the series ended with Kupperman's release.

Kupperman then took a different kind of advantage. Schlagel had charged him with seeking out the beautiful young wife Schlagel had left behind. Kupperman found her, and gave her Schlagel's best. He also gave her Kupperman's best. Six months later, she and Kupperman headed for the United States.

Like so many romances, the ending was tragicomic. Schlagel's wife developed into a fat shrew who finally died of overweight. No matter; Schlagel still wanted revenge, and came to the States to seek it after his release. He knew Kupperman would have changed his name, of course, but he wouldn't change his chess style.

Consequently, year after year, Schlagel-Yankovich ran his advertisement in the chess journals, hoping to find the player whose method Schlagel would recognize in an instant . . .

"Well, that's what happened," Milo Bloom told his roommate at Misercordia Hospital. "Believe me, if I didn't have a nosy landlady, I would be dead now. Luckily, she called the ambulance in time.

"Sure, it was a terrible thing to happen to anybody. But at least I've learned my lesson. Life wasn't meant to be spent pushing funny-looking pieces around a checkered board. But maybe you've never even tried the game . . ."

The man in traction mumbled something.

"What was that?" Milo asked.

"I play," Dietz said. "I play chess. I've even got a pocket set with me."

Milo, merely curious to see what the set looked like, eased himself out of bed and removed it from the bedside table. It was a nice little one, all leather and ivory.

"It's not a bad way to pass the time," Dietz said cautiously. "I mean, I know you said you'd never play anymore, but—if you wanted to try just *one* game . . ."

Milo looked at his casts, and said, "Even if I wanted to play—how could *you*?"

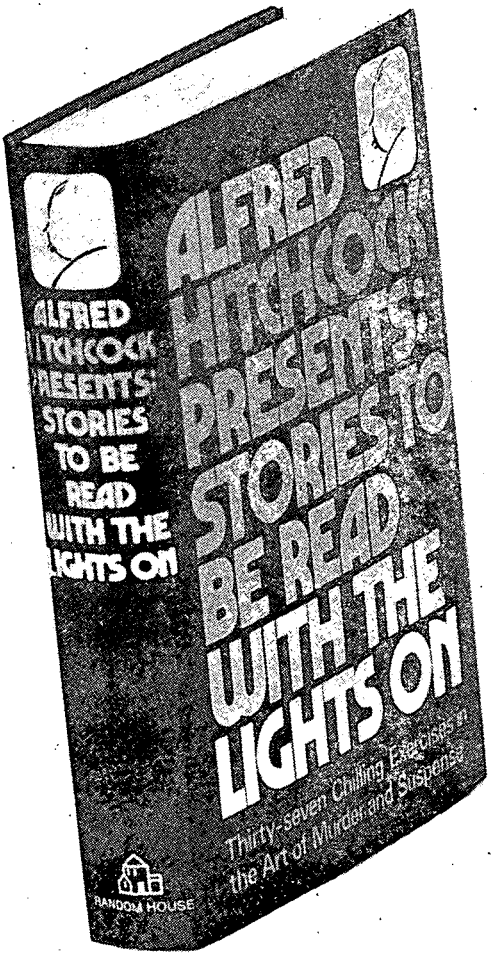
Dietz smiled shyly, and showed him. He picked up the pieces with his teeth. In the face of a dedication matching his own, how could Milo refuse? He moved the Pawn to P-K4.

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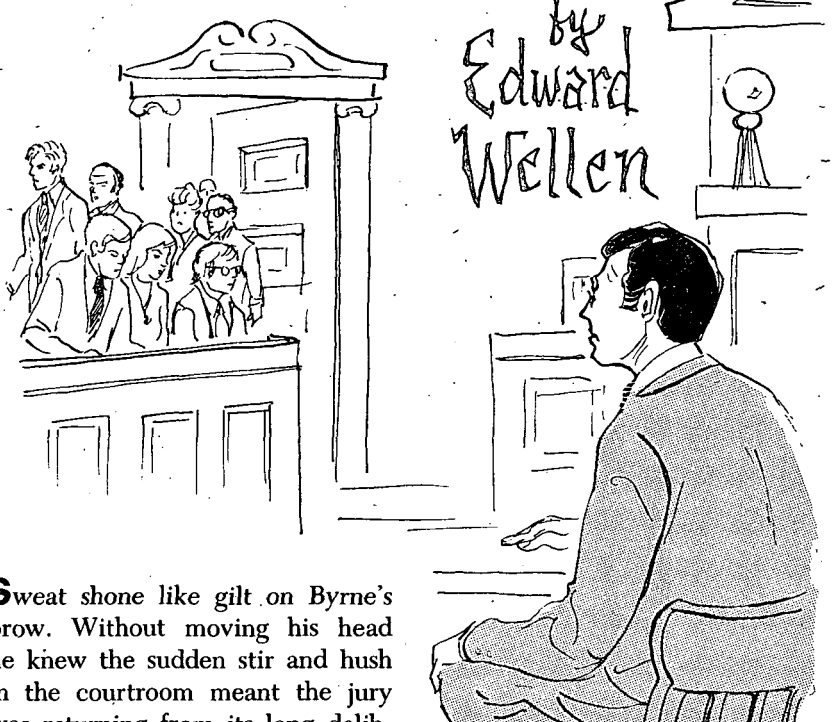
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Getting away with murder may be difficult to keep to oneself.

Final Acquittal

by Edward Wellen



Sweat shone like gilt on Byrne's brow. Without moving his head he knew the sudden stir and hush in the courtroom meant the jury was returning from its long delib-

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eration. He tried to maintain his air of impassiveness, but as the jurors filed in he was stiff with willing them to look at him. Somewhere he had heard that when a returning jury avoided looking at the defendant it was because the jury had made up its collective mind to convict.

Now, however, when members of the jury did in fact eye Byrne it gave him no comfort. He still could not tell. He was unable to read the eyes behind the glittering glasses on the grave face of the butcher who was the foreman. The fixed faint smile on the face of the woman smoothing her skirt beside the foreman might be a smile she meant to be reassuring, then again it might be a smile of gloating.

Byrne looked no further. In any case, the judge's gavel was drowning out his heartbeat. Hogan, his defense attorney, nudged him to stand and face the jury.

The judge leaned forward slowly. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

The foreman balanced himself by pressing his thumb on the railing. "We have, your Honor."

"What is your verdict?"

The foreman hammily let a pause weight the air. "We find the defendant not guilty."

Newsmen charged out. Byrne's knees gave, but he held himself up. The prosecuting attorney, voice trembling with anger, demanded a poll. The judge gaveled down a babble, permitted the polling, discharged Byrne, rather coldly thanked the jurors and discharged them—but that was all a blur to Byrne.

He sat down heavily. For a moment he had a job focusing, then he turned to his lawyer. He took Hogan's hand in both of his, thanking him silently. Hogan freed himself and began stuffing papers into his battered briefcase.

The courtroom was emptying except for a few friends making their way toward Byrne. His late wife's aunts had stopped by the door. Meed was with them, looking embarrassed because he was a friend of Byrne's and yet a second cousin, or something of the kind, and business associate of the women.

"Justice!" the tall thin one said, looking right at Byrne.

"A mockery!" the other said.

They wheeled and stalked out. Meed awkwardly followed them, throwing back a don't-get-me-wrong look of appeal at Byrne.

Byrne smiled wryly. The smile faded as he caught Lt. Harris of Homicide watching him. Lt. Harris, the man who had arrested him

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and testified against him, stood leaning against a pillar, a twisted smile on his face. Then people were between them, blocking Harris from Byrne's view, friends coming with uncertain eagerness through the gate from the spectators' section.

Byrne stood up. His legs were still weak but he knew he was able to proceed under his own motive power. A surge of need told him to get far from this place and its sickening associations. Yet now that he could leave, could step outside and breathe the sooty air of freedom, he hesitated.

His friends were crowding around uncomfortably, trying to keep out of their eyes that they were wondering how to word their congratulations.

"I knew you had to get off."

"Of course. Absurd to think you could ever have . . ."

"We all know you loved Madelon too much to . . ."

Byrne found his voice. "You stood by me, that's what counts. I can't thank you enough." His face twisted, but in a smile. "Don't worry, I'm not going to get sloppy. Except maybe sloppy drunk."

They laughed, but their laughter had a forced, hollow sound in the courtroom, where so many voices had wrung the most out of rhetoric throughout the trial.

He saw Meed returning. He looked down at Hogan pounding the briefcase on the table to settle the papers and make room for more to be placed crosswise on top. Then Meed was at his elbow.

Keeping his eyes on Byrne, almost defensively, Meed nodded toward the outside, where he had gone with the aunts. "I was just seeing them to a taxi. I had to come back to tell you I never for a moment believed you murdered Madelon."

"Thanks." Byrne glanced around at his friends hovering in an uneasy arc. Abruptly he took a step toward the door. "How about all of you coming up to our—to my apartment for a few drinks. Say in an hour; give me a chance to get ready."

All but Hogan accepted, nodding almost too eagerly.

Byrne eyed Hogan. "How about it?"

Hogan snapped his briefcase shut. "I don't make a practice of socializing with my clients." Then he seemed to come to a decision. "But I'll be there." He smiled a rare smile that transformed his gray face. He said for Byrne's ears alone, "Frankly, Byrne, you puzzle me." His smile widened. "I can afford to say that now."

A court attendant, eyeing Byrne

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with curiosity, showed him out through a side entrance. The door closed. No one passing paid Byrne any mind. He breathed deep—it was fine to be alone, unwatched, free. Then farther along the block he saw a weary-looking Lt. Harris getting into a police car. Byrne quickened his step, came alongside just as the door slammed.

"Hello, Lieutenant."

Harris eyed him bleakly.

Byrne received heartier greetings when his friends showed up. They were almost too hearty. To do them justice, they were trying hard to be cheerful and nonchalant, to accept him unquestioningly, to pretend the death and the trial had never been.

Hogan sat quietly to one side, his eyes never leaving Byrne's face, trying to strike through the mask of flesh. Meed, too, sat apart, eyes for the most part on the drink in his hands, like a man watching a gauge. The others milled around.

Their keynote was gaiety, but there were warning looks from one to another, irrelevant comments on innocuous topics, sudden silences and sudden spates of talk, and much reaching for glasses. They watched Byrne out of eye-corners, plainly thinking, *the man's been through a great nervous ordeal; he won't want to talk about it, at least not right now.*

Yet he did talk about it. He had been upending his glass, seemingly without stop, and now began commenting mockingly on the judge, prosecuting attorney, and jurors.

They eyed him in polite puzzlement, as though witnessing a stranger. They had never known him to drink like this or talk like this; but then, hadn't his ordeal earned him a measure of forbearance? Hadn't it warranted a certain amount of license? They tried to relax understandingly, but they fell silent.

Byrne's nostrils whitened. He looked around. He was holding himself in but it was like holding in a steel spring. "Come on, this isn't a wake. It's a reawakening. Let's celebrate."

They laughed uneasily.

Byrne lifted his glass. "To my loyal friends." He tossed it off, then grinned suddenly. "People usually suspend judgment—like a sword."

This won him a round of unsure smiles and nods.

Byrne refilled his glass sloppily. "There'll always be suspicion in the minds of some." He swayed slightly. "Let me put *your* minds at rest."

They tried to wave him down deprecatingly, but he seemed

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blind to them. He gazed past them, through the French doors which opened on the balcony, at the night and at the dim reflections of all of them in the room.

He said almost casually, but pronouncing the words with care, "I got away with murder." A bright, wild look flared in his eyes as though he knew he was overdoing it but didn't know when or how to stop. He said into the silence, "I killed Madelon."

They sat in shock, wanting to disbelieve, but believing.

He started to go on. "I can speak freely, without fear of further prosecution . . ."

Rising almost as a jury about to retire, they drew back from Byrne, set down the drinks with great care, and fumbled getting their coats and hats, their faces saying they were already gone.

Hogan was first to the door. He stopped and faced Byrne, examining him crossly. "I knew I shouldn't have come. I suppose this was the very thing I was afraid of." He left without pausing to put on his hat and coat, his face set, it seemed, more in anger at himself than at Byrne.

The others left silently, in various degrees of disgust. Everyone left but Meed.

Meed sat twirling his glass and gauging it with an odd smile.

Byrne turned on him challengingly. "How come you didn't pull out with the rest?"

Meed looked up with a sorrowful, understanding smile. "Because I know it isn't true." He put up a forestalling hand. "Oh, I know why you said that. Not to shock us; not to get back at society that put you on trial for something you didn't do."

"No? Then why?"

"Because you *feel* guilty. It's only human. All of us have at one time wished someone else dead. And if that person dies we feel—even if we had nothing to do with the death—a kind of guilt."

Byrne eyed him mockingly. "Oh? You think that? Well, think again. I murdered Madelon—really murdered her. And I got away with it."

Meed eyed him narrowly, with a thin smile. "Either the strain you've been under has cracked you or . . ."

Byrne leaned back easily, something between a sneer and a smirk on his face. "Or what?"

Meed shook his head. "No, I think that's it. You're just giving way to aftershock and alcohol. You've been under too much tension and you've had release."

Byrne grinned crookedly. "Meed, you're wasting your breath playing psychoanalyst.

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Murdering Madelon put no strain at all on my conscience."

Meed gazed into his glass. "Go right ahead. But when you're cold-shivering sober you'll wish you hadn't shot off your mouth."

"Speaking of shots—" Byrne downed his drink and reached for a refill. "That one was for Madelon. Poor Madelon. I done her wrong."

Meed said very quietly, "You'd better lay off the drink and that kind of talk. How do you expect to pick up the pieces of your life here?" He looked thoughtful. "Maybe it's too late already. You saw how the others took it."

"Maybe I just don't give a damn about anything, now that I've got away with murder. After all, you can't do much more than that in life, can you? You're right about one thing: I've a great feeling of release."

Meed gave a short explosive laugh. "I can understand how you might've been driven to feeling like murdering Madelon. I'll admit the woman could be trying. But that doesn't excuse your empty bragging."

Byrne raised an eyebrow in a leer. "Empty bragging? Shouldn't what I say loosely here be more credible than what I said under oath for my life?" He smiled smugly.

A shadow crossed Meed's face. He breathed hard, then he smiled. "What do you think you're proving? Only that you're irrational."

Byrne took a sizable swallow and came up looking sly. "You're trying too hard to be broad-minded. But I think down deep you're taking it like the others. What you're really angry at is not my guilt but my bad taste. Here I am boasting of my guilt just after a jury of my so-called peers has found me guiltless. Come on, confess. Isn't that it?"

Meed stood up abruptly, his eyes hostile. "You're damn right it's bad taste." He set down his glass savagely. "I should've left with the others." He snatched up his coat and rammed his arms into the sleeves. "I don't know why I stayed, except to see how much of a fool you'd prove yourself to be."

"Fool enough to get away with murder." Byrne eyed Meed disdainfully, turned and walked with great precision to the French doors, flung them open, and took a deep breath. He turned back with an evil smile.

Meed's eyes glittered. "I don't know why I should be so angry. I know you're not responsible. You're foolish drunk."

Byrne laughed. "I know what I know. I got away with murder."

Meed swelled with fury. "You

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damn blowhard, they let you go because they couldn't find the weapon. They never found it because I threw it into the quarry just outside town."

He stared in amazement as Byrne turned again to the night, moved nearer to the balcony railing, and took a deep breath.

"Didn't you hear me, Byrne? I'm saying *I'm* the one who murdered Madelon." He came up behind Byrne. "You poor drunken fool, you won't know what hit you either. I'm telling you because they're going to say you couldn't live with the guilt you admitted here tonight. Listen to me, damn you. I'm saying *I* did it. I was tired of her, but she threatened to make the end of the affair messy, and so—" Hands drawing back to push, he advanced on Byrne, watching him intently.

Lt. Harris stepped between them out of the darkness on the balcony, handcuffs gleaming. Meed froze till too late; the cuffs clicked fast.

Byrne turned slowly and saw the gleams as webbed blurs, like stars burning in mist. His vision cleared and he saw Lt. Harris eyeing him with a twisted smile.

"So I was wrong. I still don't know why I went along with you on this. I thought sure you did it—even up to just now." He shoved Meed toward the door. "Good night, Mr. Byrne."

"Good night, Lieutenant." He turned again to the night. He heard the door close. He took a deep drink of night. Night would soon fade. He would take a deep, deep drink of dawn.

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If at first you don't succeed, draw, draw again . . .



The Card Game

by Patrick O'Keeffe

Marina Mejas was murdered aboard the *Corriente* during the first night out from Panama on the two-day voyage to San Tomas. The *Corriente* was a small steamer plying between Central American ports, in a coastwise feeder service for cargoes transshipped from big American and European freighters discharging at main ports. Although her port of registry was San Tomas, she was American owned and operated, with officers holding licenses issued by American or European maritime authorities, her crew mainly Latin Americans.

During the early part of the evening after sailing, Westill, her chief radio officer, received three radiograms for two of the thirty or so passengers. Two were addressed to Senorita Carlotta Lopez; one of them came from her father, Manuel Lopez, head of the secret police, welcoming her home; the other was a passionately worded message filled with love and kisses, signed "Ricardo." The third radiogram was addressed to Senor Jose Sosa, and had what seemed a cryptic three-word text, "Ace of Spades;" there was no signature, and the office of origin was San Tomas. According to Westill's copy of the passenger list, Jose Sosa was an insurance salesman.

In response to Westill's ring, Ramon, the bellboy, came up to the radio room to pick up and deliver the radiograms. Ramon was a young law-school graduate out of a post in his profession. His face was brown, with Indian features

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and keen black eyes, which seemed to fasten momentarily on Jose Sosa's name as he glanced at the envelopes. He hurried off in silence, and returned presently with the receipts.

"Senor Westill, Senorita Lopez expects to receive more radiograms signed Ricardo, and wishes them delivered any hour of the day or night."

Westill smiled as he stapled the receipts to the carbon duplicates of the messages. He was in his late twenties, a tall, sandy-haired Midwesterner, with a tan as deep as his uniform shirt. The *Corriente's* three radio officers and radio-telegraph equipment were provided by an American radio-telegraph corporation, which required the radio officers to know Spanish and serve aboard for at least one year. Westill, however, had stayed on after his year expired; he had married a San Tomas senorita and had applied for assignment to one of the big radio-telegraph stations serving the republic.

Chuckling, Westill glanced up at his second assistant, Pablo, who was staring moodily through a porthole at the darkening smooth sea. "Carlotta must be nuts about her Ricardo."

His second assistant didn't smile. Pablo Ortiz was a quiet, good-looking young man with serious brown eyes and shiny black hair, son of the San Tomas superintendent of communications. Pablo was studying communications from the ground up and had temporarily displaced the usual American second assistant in order to get shipboard experience. "Carlotta," he said, turning to Westill, "has already jilted three lovers. She falls wildly in love with a man, but soon tires of him and throws him aside, making him look foolish."

"She must be a knockout of a beauty."

"Too beautiful for her own good. Some man is going to kill her for playing with him, and people will say she asked for it."

Next morning, when Westill was on his way down to breakfast after finishing his radio watch, he came upon a group of excited stewards and passengers outside one of the staterooms. Standing on the fringe was Jose Sosa, tall and swarthy, with a thin moustache, dressed in a white linen suit. Westill asked him what had happened.

"*Madre de Dios*! Senorita Marina Mejas was stabbed to death in her bed. El capitan, doctor, and *contador* are in there."

The stateroom door was shut. Westill was curious, but he would

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only be intruding on something that strictly wasn't his business at the moment if he went inside; and, anyway, he would be told all about the murder when the captain filed a radiogram reporting it. He continued on to the dining saloon.

Westill had no sooner returned to his room from breakfast than the captain called him to his office. Captain Alborg was a short, blue-eyed Dane with an affable middle-aged disposition. He sat hunched in khaki shorts and shirt trimmed with gold epaulets, his round face creased with worry. He gestured to Westill to take a chair while he told him about the murder.

The victim, Marina Mejas, had been a sort of personal maid to Carlotta Lopez. Carlotta was returning from a six-week visit to an aunt in Panama City. She and Marina Mejas were occupying adjoining single-berth staterooms, with a bathroom in between, and they both had turned in about eleven o'clock, hooking their doors ajar because of the hot night. Carlotta wakened at seven-thirty to the gong sounding the first call for breakfast; she waited for some response from her maid, and when Marina did not appear, Carlotta went through into the next stateroom and saw Marina lying on the bed with the front of her nightdress red with blood. She ran out into the passageway, screaming for the stewardess.

"Marina Mejas had been stabbed through the heart," Captain Alborg said in English, which he spoke perfectly and preferred, his Spanish being poor. "Apparently nothing was stolen. The murderer seemingly went in with the sole purpose of killing the woman sleeping in that bed. He may have killed the wrong woman."

"The wrong woman?"

"When Carlotta turned in last night, she felt a slight draft from a mushroom ventilator in the deckhead. She's susceptible to colds from even slight drafts, so she made Marina Mejas change beds with her for the night. No one else knew of the switch, of course, and the murderer would have been unlikely to notice it in the dark."

"You think he was someone with a grudge against Carlotta Lopez?"

"More likely against her father. Carlotta told me in private that a few weeks ago the daughter of a Calderonist leader was shot by the secret police. Manuel Lopez stated that it was accidental. The Calderonists claimed that he was lying and vowed an eye for an

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eye. They're a vindictive group."

"If you're right, it means there may be a Calderonist cell on board."

"Or a single Calderonist among the passengers—I hope it's only that," the captain went on uneasily. "I've been afraid a cell might be set up here for sabotaging the ship if ever the army wanted to use her as a troop transport for quelling an uprising somewhere. You know what that would mean for me. And for you too."

Captain Alborg was alluding to the fact that after accepting command of the *Corriente* a couple of years ago, he had settled his wife and family in San Tomas, in the belief that the ship, newly built, would remain in the coastwise service for years to come. If the ship were scuttled, he would be out of a berth. So would Westill.

The captain had meanwhile taken a radiogram form from a desk drawer and was writing a long, detailed report on the murder to the line's main office in San Tomas. Handing it to Westill, he said, "That's sure to bring a quick response from Manuel Lopez when he's told about it. I'm waiting first to see if he orders any drastic measures for the protection of his daughter. Otherwise, I have a plan of my own. I'm letting it be believed on board that Marina Mejas was killed by someone with a grudge against her. I want it kept that way as regards passengers and crew. So far, only the doctor and myself, as well as the purser and the stewardess, know about the switch in beds."

"You feel you can trust the stewardess?"

"If she's a Calderonist, she'll know only that I'm making the murder appear to be an act of revenge of some sort; she won't get to know my plan." The captain shook his head deploringly. "That's what the republic's come to—you don't know who's a Calderonist or who's a secret-police spy."

Westill took the radiogram along to the radio room. His first assistant, Chuck, a young blond Chicagoan, had the watch, and Pablo was chatting with him. After reading through the captain's message, Chuck, new and making his second voyage in the *Corriente*, muted the Morse signals coming from the loudspeaker and asked, "Who are the Calderonists?"

Westill left it to Pablo to tell him. "They are a newly organized underground movement, named after *revolucionary* leader Jaime Calderon. He was killed by the secret police, trying to escape, it was said. The Calderonists are

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made up of small cells, maybe one, two, three members, so they cannot be infiltrated by the secret police. The members of each cell do not always know who the others are, so if the secret police arrest one, they cannot torture him into betraying the others. The Calderonists use passwords and codes to communicate. Cells have been formed in banks, government offices, communications, transportation—everywhere, to cripple the government with sabotage and assassinations when the *revolucion* breaks out."

Quite a long spiel, mused Westill, and worthy of the son of a minor government official, whose influence had led to the assignment of Pablo as a student operator aboard the *Corriente*.

The captain's radiogram brought a swift and urgent response from Manuel Lopez: "Take every precaution ensure safety Carlotta stop Place all suspects under immediate arrest stop Interrogate fully every person known be vicinity at time of murder and act accordingly stop Authorize you order Carlotta obey you in measures necessary her protection stop signed Manuel Lopez."

Westill took the radiogram along to the captain's quarters, instead of waiting for Ramon to answer Chuck's ring. The message left Captain Alborg both uneasy and resentful.

"That man could break me if anything happened to Carlotta. I don't have a single suspect. No one was seen entering or leaving Marina Mejas' stateroom. No one knows what time she was murdered, so who can say who was in the vicinity when it was committed? Doesn't he know that the captain of a ship can't go around like the secret police, interrogating passengers and crew, tossing them into irons if he doesn't like their answers or manner? The ship flies the flag of the republic, but my license was issued in Copenhagen, and that's where it can be revoked."

"It puts you in the hot seat," Westill said sympathetically.

"But with Lopez' authority, I can now go ahead and do things my own way, nab the Calderonist without chasing around the ship looking for suspects. After failing last night, he perhaps won't want to risk a second attempt, but by letting it be thought that Marina Mejas was the intended victim, and assuming the stewardess isn't a Calderonist, I hope to draw him into making a second try and trap him. If he's a crew member, it could lead to breaking up the shipboard cell. I'll send for Carlotta now. You may as well stay

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and listen to what she'll have to say about her father's message, in case I need a witness if she refuses to cooperate."

Ramon answered the captain's ring, and several minutes later he showed in Carlotta Lopez. She was beautiful, no doubt about it, mused Westill. She was in the mid-twenties, with a milky-white complexion, lips full and eyelashes long and natural, her hair dark and short, held back by a multi-colored ribbon. In contrast with the captain and Westill, moist from the sticky heat of the cabin despite two humming electric fans, she looked as cool in her pink dress as if she had just stepped from the ship's cold-storage room.

Captain Alborg rose to greet her and introduced Westill as *el jefe radiotelegrafista.* He handed her the radiogram, saying, "Senor Westill just received that from your father."

She gave Westill a quick perfunctory smile. After reading the message, she said, "Capitan, I am willing to agree to whatever you think necessary to carry out my father's instructions."

"Muchas gracias, Senorita! I have a plan for complying with your father's wishes and at the same time capturing the Calderonist. I'll now make the necessary arrangements for putting my plan into effect and will explain it to you later. Meanwhile, continue conveying the impression that you believe Marina Mejas' death was some kind of revenge killing."

"I hope you will kill the Calderonist, Capitan," Carlotta said coldly. "There will then be no danger that he might escape."

"He will be put in irons and kept for the police to deal with," the captain said stiffly.

After she had gone, Westill grinned. "Beautiful, but I'd hate to be married to her."

When Westill relieved Pablo in the radio room at four o'clock, he began looking over the radiograms Pablo had handled during his afternoon watch.

"There was another for dear Carlotta from her Ricardo," Pablo remarked sardonically.

There was also another for Jose Sosa, with text, "Deuce of diamonds," again with no signature and office of origin San Tomas. In the transmitted file was one by Jose Sosa, addressed to Alfaro Diaz, General Delivery, San Tomas. The text read, "Draw again."

As Westill sat eyeing the transmitted message curiously, Pablo said, "Jose Sosa appears to be playing some kind of card game. He sent that one up with Ramon

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and the money. The one naming the deuce of diamonds seems to me to be a reply to it."

"Could be," said Westill, with an indifferent shrug.

During the slack moments of his watch, however, Westill's thoughts dwelt on those three Jose Sosa radiograms, but he didn't express them until after Chuck relieved him at eight o'clock and he went along to the captain's room to hear about the arrangements for nabbing the Calderonist. The sea was still calm and a breeze cooled the room. Captain Alborg was relaxing with a copy of *La Vista*. He put down the magazine, eager to outline his plan.

"Everything's arranged. Carlotta Lopez will spend the night up here in the officers' quarters, in the pilot room. I showed her where it is, and gave her the key. I warned her not to tell a soul she won't be spending the night in her stateroom. The chief officer and the purser will be in it, waiting to grab the Calderonist if he shows up. I told the chief officer to waken me at once if the trap works; if nothing had happened by four o'clock, then to give up and go and get some sleep. The second mate is to call me at four o'clock, to stand the chief officer's morning watch on the bridge."

Westill then told the captain about the Jose Sosa radiograms. "Perhaps I'm imagining things because of the murder last night. Pablo thinks the messages are some kind of card game by radio, but I'm wondering if they could be connected with Carlotta. They might be code messages of some sort. Pablo remarked this morning that Calderonists communicate by codes."

"There might be something in your suspicions," agreed the captain. "They'll be confirmed if Jose Sosa turns up in the trap."

After leaving the captain's room, it struck Westill that if a message came from Ricardo during the night, it would perhaps give away the trap when the night steward tried to deliver it to Carlotta in her stateroom. Westill went back to the radio room. Chuck was alone. Pablo had turned in.

"Carlotta Lopez is sleeping in the pilot room tonight," Westill told Chuck. "The captain put her in there for her protection, in line with her father's radiogram this morning. So hold till morning any messages from Ricardo. Pass the word along to Pablo when he relieves you at midnight."

When Westill in turn relieved Pablo at four o'clock next morning, Pablo greeted him with a sleepy smile, saying, "Nothing

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from Ricardo," and went away to his room.

Of more concern to Westill was the fact that the captain's scheme for nabbing the Calderonist hadn't worked. Otherwise, the captain would surely have been along by now to report its success with a radiogram, and Pablo would have mentioned it. Westill sat listening only absently to the occasional radio signals and early-morning static issuing from the loudspeaker. He was thinking that the chief officer and the purser would have given up waiting by now, and the captain would be on the bridge.

Suddenly the telephone rang. It was the captain, his voice heavy with disappointment. "The chief officer and the purser waited till four o'clock, but the Calderonist didn't show up."

"Perhaps he got a hint of the trap somehow."

"I don't know what to think. Perhaps I was all wrong and Marina Mejas' killing was a revenge murder after all. The chief officer and the purser say they're sure no one saw them going into the stateroom. I'll see what Carlotta has to say when she turns out. She may have made a careless remark of some sort."

Carlotta Lopez was already beyond being able to tell him anything. About eight o'clock, Captain Alborg came rushing into the radio room, consternation in his round face. He thrust a radiogram at Westill. "Send that off right away. Carlotta Lopez was strangled in the pilot room during the night."

Westill stared at him dumbly.

"When the third mate relieved me on the bridge for breakfast, I went down to the pilot room to see if Carlotta was up. I knocked on the door, knocked two or three times without getting an answer. I finally tried the door, thinking she might already have gone down to breakfast. It opened. Carlotta was lying on the deck, just inside. There was a big bruise on her forehead, as if she'd been knocked unconscious first, and a dress belt was tight around her neck."

"She must not have locked the door," Westill said. "But who could possibly have known—?"

"I don't know who or how," the captain cried distractedly. "I'm leaving it to Manuel Lopez to find out."

When the *Corriente* docked in San Tomas toward ten o'clock, secret police immediately swarmed aboard. Two khaki-clad and armed local policemen were stationed at the foot of the gangway with orders to allow no one to enter or leave the ship without per-

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mission. Presently the radio-room telephone rang with a call from the captain, saying that Manuel Lopez wanted to see the Jose Sosa radiograms and one of his men was coming to pick them up. A few moments later, a man in a seersucker suit and a panama hat came in from the passageway to the captain's room and carried off the three radiograms.

About twenty minutes later, Captain Alborg telephoned again and told Westill that Manuel Lopez had finished with the radiograms and they could now be returned to the radio files. Westill went along for them. The captain was alone in his room.

"Jose Sosa knew nothing about the radiograms," the captain said. "The signature on the receipts wasn't his. So Manuel Lopez then had Ramon brought up here. Ramon refused to talk. He was taken down to the empty stateroom the secret police are using as an operations room, to make him talk."

"They'll give him a pretaste of what to expect if they have to take him ashore to work him over," Westill said lugubriously.

He was glad he had spoken in English, for Manuel Lopez suddenly strode in. He was a slight man in a dark suit, pale-skinned and wearing gold-rimmed glasses, more the kind of man Westill would have expected to see behind a jewelry counter. His expression was one of mixed grief and rage, but it softened as the captain introduced Westill.

"You did well, Senor Westill, to call el capitan's attention to those Jose Sosa radiograms." Turning to the captain, Manuel Lopez said, "Ramon confessed to being a Calderonist. Before sailing from San Tomas on your last voyage, he received an anonymous telephone call. He was informed that each member of the ship's cell would be mailed a playing card, with instructions. Ramon was to open any radiogram addressed to Jose Sosa, and if it named a card, he was to destroy the radiogram and sign Jose Sosa's name on the receipt; if not, he was to deliver the radiogram in the usual manner since it would be a genuine one. He was to print the name of the card mentioned in the radiogram on the margin of some notice posted for the crew. Cell members would have instructions to watch for it, and the member holding that card was to kill Carlotta."

Manuel Lopez' voice broke on his daughter's name. "If the attempt failed, Ramon was to send that "Draw again" radiogram, and the procedure would be repeated with another card named. Undoubtedly Alfaro Diaz and the

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senders of the other two radiograms will be untraceable. Jose Sosa's name as the addressee for the fake radiograms was probably chosen at random from a copy of the passenger list."

"Ramon," concluded Manuel Lopez, "didn't know about your trap, Capitan. Nor who else is in his cell; he is the member through whom orders were passed anonymously from shore. There was proof enough without a confession that he murdered Marina Mejas: a bloodstained galley knife was found in his locker, and an ace of spades in his wallet."

"Then you don't know who got the deuce of diamonds and how he got to know that Carlotta was up here in the pilot room?"

"No, Capitan. But I'll find him," Manuel Lopez vowed grimly, "even if it takes me a lifetime."

Westill spoke up. "I've been mulling it over about Carlotta. She was found on the floor, not in bed, like Senorita Mejas. Apparently she must have got up to unlock the door for someone."

"That, Senor Westill," said Manuel Lopez drily, "naturally occurred to me, too. I'm trying to discover for whom on board she was willing to open her door in the middle of the night."

"He wouldn't need to be on board. Ricardo, for instance."

"Ricardo! Are you loco?"

"Senorita Carlotta requested that radiograms from Ricardo be delivered to her any hour of the day or night. If someone knocked lightly on her door and said he'd just received a message from Ricardo, and would she please sign for it—"

"Name all who had that knowledge," demanded Manuel Lopez.

"Not only who had that knowledge but also knew where Senorita Carlotta was spending the night. One such man stood a watch close by, right here in these quarters, from midnight to four o'clock, with everyone else in the vicinity fast asleep—"

"Pablo Ortiz!" exclaimed the captain. "I find it hard to believe."

"But not if you knew the truth about him," said Manuel Lopez in sudden fury. "Carlotta once foolishly encouraged his attentions, but came to her senses and rejected him. It was a shock to his pride. He has taken advantage of the Calderonist plot to revenge himself."

Manuel Lopez rushed out and along the passageway to the radio room.

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When one has visionary problems, it must be comforting to find a willing counterpart.



by George C. Chesbro

Bathed and naked, Matt Lincoln lay prone on the floor and began the meditative process that by now had become so familiar to him. For a few moments he thought of Karin and the airplane in which she was traveling. Then he closed his eyes and began a carefully measured deep-breathing exercise, emptying his mind, focusing his attention on an imaginary pinpoint of light deep within his brain behind the pineal gland, the legendary "third eye."

Suddenly, unbidden, Karin's face filled the psychic screen behind his eyes. Matt took it as a welcome sign that he was on target. Blonde, green-eyed, with translucent skin and high Nordic cheekbones, she was all the woman Matt had ever wanted, and he loved her as he had never loved another. She was, in a most literal sense, the girl of his dreams. Still, the fact that Karin existed only in his imagination—for the moment—did not bother Matt. While his only contact with her had been on the astral plane, he was convinced that she, as well as the 747 and her fellow passengers, also existed on the physical plane and that he would eventually find her. *If* he could save her.

His limbs had gone numb, and all feeling was concentrated in the pit of his stomach. Soon that sensation too had vanished, and the image of Karin was replaced by a vast, pulsating wall of vividly colored diamond shapes, red, black

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and yellow. There was a faint hum: the sound of the universe. Then he was away. In his mind's eye Matt watched his astral body rise into the air, float for a few moments, then vanish into the wall of color.

"Hello," Karin said quietly, placing her book on her lap. "I see you're awake. I hope I didn't disturb you. I can never sleep on airplanes."

Matt blinked and quickly looked around him. The interior of the 747 was as he remembered it from his previous journeys—cavernous, jammed with people. This was a night flight, and most of the passengers were sleeping. Next to him Karin was isolated in the intense, narrow cone of light projected from the overhead lamp. The drone of the giant engines, felt rather than heard, was steady, giving no indication of the danger Matt knew was there.

He did not know where the plane was coming from or where it was headed.

Matt looked into Karin's green eyes and smiled. "No," he said, "you didn't disturb me."

His voice, like hers, was distant and blurred in his ears, but he had come to accept this as natural. Most important, speaking—at least to Karin—did not disturb his trance. Before meeting Karin he had never spoken in his projections; there had rarely been an opportunity, and never a need. He had hovered over the rolling African veld; stood transfixed in the beautiful and deadly white glare of the savage Antarctic wastelands; he had watched nomadic tribes crossing the deserts of Iran and Afghanistan; observed the bustle of noonday traffic in Times Square; he had watched men building pyramids and men landing on Mars. He had watched Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon and heard his first words two years before the event actually took place.

On the astral plane there was no distinction between past, present and future.

His meeting with Karin was the first personal contact he had ever made with another person, and Matt considered this highly significant. He took this to mean that there was some link between himself, the girl and the airplane; a link he had not yet established.

What he had established was that this plane would crash, killing all aboard and many on the ground. This was what Matt hoped to prevent, through Karin. She was the key.

"Do you believe in precognition?" His voice was very faint, warped, and for a moment

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Matt was afraid she wouldn't understand him, or that he was coming out of trance.

Karin gave no indication, however, that she noticed anything out of the ordinary. She thought for a few moments, then gave a simple nod of her head. "Yes," she said simply. "I believe there are some people who can catch glimpses of the future."

"I am one of those people," Matt said. "I am a psychic, and a very good one. It's very important that you believe me."

"I do believe you," Karin said evenly. Again she looked at him and smiled.

"Then you must believe that this plane will crash unless you can find a way to stop it."

He had expected some kind of reaction; anger, fear, surprise, outrage. There was none.

"How do you know it will crash?" she asked.

"I dreamed it."

"Just now?"

Matt avoided the question. He could not say "yesterday," could not say that the flight was part of a trance-induced dream that he had returned to six times over the space of the past month, because somewhere in the time-space continuum the flight was—or would be—*real*. How Karin was able to see and speak with him was a mystery he preferred not to probe. There might not be time. Since Karin was the only person *he* could communicate with aboard the flight, he could not afford to let her think that he was mad. "I don't know when, where or how the plane is going to crash," Matt said quickly. "But it will crash."

"Unless I can prevent it?"

"Yes!" Matt motioned toward Karin's uniform with the name tag on it, the cap beside her. "You're a stewardess. They'll listen to you. You can probably get into the cockpit. Make up some kind of excuse, anything, but get the captain to double check every instrument. Make him find out what's wrong!"

"I'm just in transit," Karin said. There was something in her voice that disturbed Matt, a hot, tense excitement that should have been fear and wasn't. Her lips were moist, her eyes wide. "I have nothing to do with this flight. They won't listen to me."

"They have to listen to you! If they don't, all of you are going to die!"

"All of *us*?"

The words were out and there was no way to take them back; and he knew the rest would follow. He was suddenly very tired, too tired to tell anything but the

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truth. He sank back in his seat and watched the sun break over a mountain range in the distance. The mountains somehow seemed familiar.

"I won't die in the crash because I'm not physically here," Matt said wearily.

He had expected Karin to laugh. She didn't. Instead, she simply said, "But I can see you."

Matt shook his head. "And talk to me. I don't understand it." He paused, heard himself sigh. The sound was like a wave washing ashore. "I'm projecting astrally; I am able to take my mind, my personality out of my body."

"I have heard of it," Karin said softly. "And I believe you."

"I first broke through ten years ago and I've made hundreds of trips since then. But it's never been like this; what I'm doing now is supposed to be . . . there's no record of this kind of communication. A month ago I went into trance and found myself on this flight . . . with you. I never understood why, and I still don't. But I thought of you constantly when I was awake and I knew I had to see you again. Because of that, I did something I had never done before: I made a conscious effort to return to a place I had already been, to this airplane."

"Because you found you could talk to me?" Karin asked him.

"Because I found I loved you." He glanced sideways at Karin. The artificial light from the overhead lamp had been washed out by the first rays of the sun. She was staring silently at him, her full lips pursed in a mysterious half-smile.

"Last night I dreamed that this plane would crash," he continued, "and I knew I had to find a way to warn you. I'd tried to make contact with the pilot, the others, myself. I couldn't. That's why you have to find a way to stop this airplane from crashing. I don't want to lose you. I don't want anyone to be killed."

"Are you afraid of death?"

"No."

"Then you're wise. If you can do the things you say you can, then you understand that 'death,' as you call it, is nothing more than the passage from one state to another, to another level of existence. What, then, is your concern for us?"

"My concern is for you, and for the sorrow of the living." He paused, suddenly realizing that Karin's questions and answers were far too clinical and detached. "You think I'm mad, don't you?"

"No," Karin said. She suddenly leaned across the seat, put her

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hands behind Matt's neck and drew him close to her, kissing him on the mouth. Her lips were warm and sweet, trembling with passion. For long moments he allowed himself to sink down into that flesh, forgetting everything else, floating in a satin sea of desire and ecstasy. Then Karin withdrew her mouth and whispered in his ear, "I think you're too late."

Matt opened his eyes and glanced out the window. He suddenly knew why the mountains in the distance had looked familiar to him; he had hiked and camped in them. The mountains were in the northern part of his home state. Judging from the angle of the sun, the plane was on a direct route toward the town where he lived. In another twenty minutes or a half hour the 747 would fly almost directly over his home.

Unless . . .

To Matt's right, across the aisle, a man was awake and stretching. He rubbed his eyes, then rose and leaned through Matt and Karin to look out the window. It was only then that Matt realized that Karin's seat was as empty as his.

Matt rose, closed his eyes and began the first of the mental exercises necessary to break the trance.

Karin's hand on his was warm, inviting. "Don't go," she said.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. Karin was naked now, her firm, young body a promise of pleasure such as he had never known. Forever, or never.

"It's . . ." The trance was difficult to break. Karin was holding on to him, gripping his mind.

"Stay," she whispered. "You said yourself, there's no need to be afraid of me."

". . . not time."

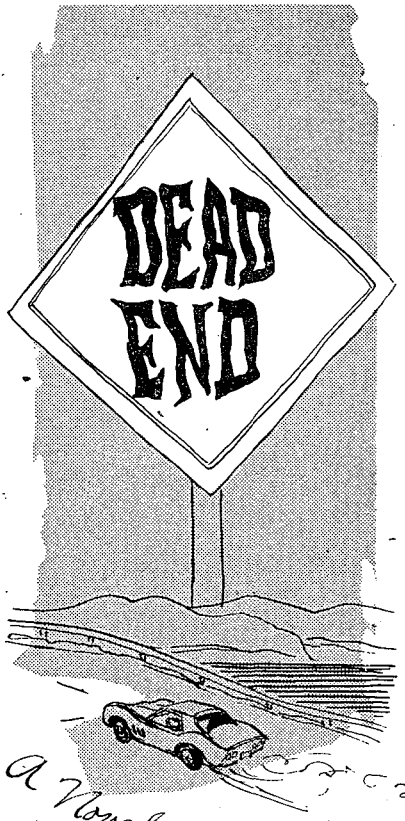
Matt stood shivering in his bathrobe on a hilltop three quarters of a mile from his home as the giant jet fell from the sky. It exploded on impact, engulfing Matt's house and a string of others in its deadly tidal wave of flaming gasoline and disintegrating metal.

The people with him—those neighbors he had been able to arouse and coax out of their homes—stared in shocked silence, then began to moan, cry and pray, their hymn of anguish counterpointed by the shrill chorus of sirens in the distance.

Matt turned and walked away from them. Already his mind was elsewhere, on a blonde, green-eyed woman he still loved and who he knew would be waiting for him at some other time, in some other place.

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Where time is not really of the essence, an entirely satisfactory conclusion can take a little longer.



A Novelette
by Stephen Wasylyk

The ringing of the phone drove deeply into my dream. I rolled over in protest, pulling the covers tight around my head in a futile gesture of defiance that dulled the shrill bell but did nothing to stop it.

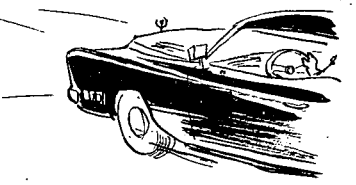
I lowered the covers reluctantly and sat up, fumbling for the dimly glowing cube of my alarm clock. It was one in the morning. I groaned. My flight had been delayed, putting me into the city only a few hours ago, and it had been well after midnight before I went to bed. Supposedly no one from the office knew I was home again. The insistent phone said otherwise.

I switched on my bedside lamp and reached for the receiver.

"Cochrane? This is Ross."

I swung my feet to the floor. "I'm listening."

"Joe DiMarco was killed



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tonight." The voice was flat, emotion held in check.

I felt my stomach muscles tense. "How?"

"I had a call five minutes ago. He skidded and smashed through the retaining wall on West River Drive and went down the embankment about eleven o'clock. They say he was killed instantly."

"Weaver goes before the grand jury tomorrow," I said slowly. "It looks like he's lucky."

"Too lucky," snapped Ross. "That's why I want you to look into it."

"You think it might not be an accident?"

"I want to be certain that it was. A sergeant named Beckett from Accident Investigation is at the scene, recovering the car. Go over there and stay with him until the cause of the accident is determined."

"DiMarco was working late. Maybe he fell asleep at the wheel."

Controlled fury was in the voice now. "Dammit, I don't want maybes! Get over there and get the facts!"

The telephone slammed down.

I replaced the receiver slowly. Three years ago, Kirby Ross had run for district attorney on a reform ticket and, through some minor miracle, had won. Maybe it was because the people believed what he said, maybe it was because Ross had charisma. Tall, handsome, with a touch of gray at the temples, articulate and photogenic, he really looked like a crusader. That was the public image. Once you knew him, you forgot appearances and found he was a very vain and arrogant man, an ambitious man who used people as he saw fit. He'd be a crusader as long as there was something in it for him.

I didn't hold that against him. He made an honest attempt at cleaning up the city by filling the D.A.'s office with men he could trust. DiMarco had been the first, as assistant D.A., a dark-haired, bouncing bundle of energy with all the talent in the world. Ross may have had the title, but DiMarco had been the mover and shaker. Then Ross had pulled me from Homicide to be his chief investigator, and for the past three years DiMarco and I had a ball.

We hadn't cleaned up the city yet. No one could do that in three years, especially since the entire administration refused to cooperate. There were quite a few big men left, among them the mayor, who had suddenly graduated into an enviable life style shortly after he was elected; several councilmen who could be counted on

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to introduce and vote for any special interest legislation for any special interest group for a given price; and quite a few department heads who awarded lucrative contracts without regard for anything except the size of their share. Sometimes I doubted there was an honest man in the administration. Money was easy and hard to resist, especially when you knew everyone about you had no qualms in taking it.

We also had to contend with several outside powers, the biggest of whom was Carleton Weaver. He had an excellent front as one of the largest contractors in town, but he made his real money in negotiating crooked contracts while heading up the drug traffic, prostitution and gambling empire it had taken him years to build before he supposedly turned legitimate.

It looked now as if DiMarco had nailed him, not for any of those things but for a technicality. Called as a witness in a multimillion-dollar building fraud, he'd naturally refused to testify. DiMarco immediately offered him freedom from prosecution. Again he refused, which was what DiMarco wanted. Weaver was held in contempt of court. He was to have been offered one more chance to testify. If he refused, the judge was prepared to give him the maximum two years in prison. It wasn't much, considering who Weaver was, but it was something. The trouble was, DiMarco had handled the whole thing and now that he was dead, there was no one prepared to step into his shoes except Ross.

Even so, the case would have to be postponed, perhaps not to be revived.

I fingered through my wardrobe for the warmest clothes I could find. A northeast snowstorm had hit the city a few days before, followed by the inevitable cold wave, and the streets were still full of slush during the day and ice at night. It would be bitter along the river at this hour of the morning and I was neither young enough nor my body upholstered enough to ignore the cold.

The spot along the Drive was easy to find. Barriers and blinking yellow caution lights funneled traffic into one lane around several parked police cars and a huge tow truck, the scene lit by portable floodlights. If it had been anyone except DiMarco, the operation would have waited until morning.

I pulled my parka hood up over my ears, flashed my identification at a patrolman on guard and slid down the embankment to where

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some men were working around the wreck.

DiMarco's car had been a popular sports model, and even though the front was pushed in and the roof flattened, it still retained its racy lines.

I worked my way to a short, overcoated man watching the operation. "It's been a few years, Beckett," I said.

Beckett smiled. "I knew you'd be here, Jack, since he was one of your boys. Ross get you out of bed?"

"That's why the man pays me. What do you know?"

Beckett's shoulders moved under his heavy coat. "He came around the curve, seemed to lose control, hit the wall and flipped over. We know because there's a witness, a guy who was heading in the opposite direction. DiMarco almost hit him. He said it was weird, so that gives you an idea of the kind of witness he is. There was one other car following DiMarco, an Olds or a Caddy, the witness isn't sure except he says it

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was a dark color. That guy never stopped. Didn't want to get involved, I suppose."

One of the crew shouted and waved. The whine of the truck engine grew louder, the steel cable stretching down the embankment grew taut, and the smashed car began to move. It rolled onto its wheels and began to climb the slope; a harshly shadowed, misshapen, battered monster struggling upward toward sanctuary across the torn snow.

"Lucky it can be towed," Beckett said. "They'll have that thing in the garage in half an hour where we can really go over it. You want to meet me there?"

"You couldn't keep me away," I said.

The police garage was tucked away in a corner of the city that consisted of flat river land occupied by an almost endless succession of automobile graveyards. I pulled up behind Beckett and followed him into the warmth of the office, slipped out of my parka and stretched, my face tingling from the warmth after being chilled by the river wind.

Beckett was pulling his third sweater over his head. He grinned. "I've been on so many of these things I know how to dress. You want some coffee?"

"I never refuse."

Beckett poured two cups, black and hot.

"Who replaces DiMarco?"

"No one," I said. I meant it. Ross was the front man. DiMarco and I had done all the work.

A sudden flurry of noise from the garage showed that the tow truck had arrived. Beckett downed his coffee. "I'd better help them get it on the lift. Not going to find anything, but I'll look because Ross insists."

I sipped my coffee slowly, thinking of DiMarco, Ross and Weaver and how our lives had become so entangled that even the death of one of us did nothing to loosen the cords. If anything, they had become tighter.

I finished my coffee and followed Beckett.

He had slipped into white coveralls and was probing the under part of the car, a powerful extension light in one hand, a screwdriver in the other.

"I thought that was a mechanic's job," I said.

"Usually is, but not this time. I don't want Ross to hit me with any unexpected questions." He stepped back. "Just as I thought. There is nothing wrong with the car. Front suspension, brakes, exhaust system, the works. All clear."

"You're certain?"

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"I'll swear to it, which means there had to be something wrong with the driver. DiMarco was no teetotaler, it was late and he could have had a few and been tired to boot. The autopsy will settle it."

I wasn't going to argue the point. "Have you checked inside the car?"

"Not yet." He pushed the button that lowered the lift, pried open the door on the passenger side, thrust the light inside and followed it, squeezing beneath the flattened roof. I did the same from the driver's side.

The interior of the car was littered with flaked and powdered glass from the now nonexistent windows. Beckett played the light around carefully, front and rear. There seemed to be nothing.

The flood of light caught and was reflected by something on the floor of the front compartment rug, a beacon in a sea of broken glass. I picked it up carefully and held it under Beckett's light, rotating it slowly. It was a clear piece of glass, thin and curved.

"That isn't window glass," Beckett said. "Looks like it's from a small bottle of some sort."

"There must be more," I said.

We searched the floor, finding several more pieces, lining them up on the bloodied seat. It was obvious they were part of a small vial, perhaps a half inch in diameter and more than two inches long.

"You tell me," I said. "Where does it fit?"

Beckett grunted. "Not part of the car."

"Maybe DiMarco was carrying it."

"I think not. Something that small would have been in his pocket."

Beckett thrust his light under the dashboard and peered after it. He grunted again. "There's a wire to the heater where there should be no wire." He probed with the screwdriver. I heard something fall. Beckett pushed aside a rectangular black fiberboard box, about nine inches wide and two inches deep, that I recognized as the deflector at the end of the heater vent. Connected to the wire, a small transistorized circuit board about three by four inches had fallen out of the deflector. It looked like a radio but I knew it wasn't made for listening to music.

Beckett examined it carefully without touching it, poking it gently with the screwdriver.

"Now you know how DiMarco died," he said.

"I know nothing," I said.

He pointed with the screw-

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driver. "The vial fitted into these brackets. The upper half is still intact." The screwdriver moved. "This plunger at the bottom is held back by a solenoid. They tapped in on the battery side of the ignition so that they had plenty of current. When the current was turned on, the solenoid moved and the rod snapped forward, breaking the vial. The rest of the circuit exists for just that purpose, to move that solenoid when it receives a signal from a transmitter."

"What transmitter?"

"It would have to be close, maybe a couple of hundred yards."

"Like in a car following DiMarco," I suggested.

"It could be."

"So the vial breaks and the vial holds something that kills DiMarco."

"Didn't have to kill him, just knock him out so he loses control on the curve. Something that vaporizes in the hot airstream because it's a cold night and DiMarco is sure to have the heater on."

"An anesthetic agent. Maybe a nerve gas."

"Take your choice. The lab will have to come up with something." Beckett slid out of the car. "We'll leave things just as they are for Homicide. It's as far as I go and I'm happy about that. This is a far-out way to kill a guy. I'm used to dynamite under the hood or the brake lines cut, but this thing belongs in a spy story somewhere. It really took a lot of brains and money to figure this out."

"It looks a little complicated," I said.

"Not complicated at all when you think of what they can do these days. You have voice-activated switches. You can send things to the moon or to space and turn them on and off at will. You can even get a little transmitter that will make your garage door go up or down without your leaving the car. Breaking a little vial at the proper time is no trick at all. Whoever did it is really clever. He wanted DiMarco dead with no trace and it almost worked. I don't normally bother too much with the inside of the car except to look for whiskey bottles." He shook his head. "It seems like there are an awful lot of ways to kill a guy."

He was right. It would take a special kind of person to conceive the idea; someone like Weaver, who would have those kinds of resources at hand. All he would have needed was someone to execute it.

Weaver might be behind it,

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Weaver *had* to be behind it, but there couldn't be too many men in the city who could build such a device and be trusted to keep quiet.

I followed Beckett into the office.

"You want to call Ross?" he asked.

I looked at my watch. It was five-thirty. "Not yet. Let him sleep a few hours. This is going to hit him right between the eyes and he'll need all the rest he can get. I have something to check on first."

"Can I help?"

I slipped into my parka. "You give Homicide the details and tell them I'll be in touch."

The predawn darkness was cold and still, the wind gone. The inside of my car felt like a refrigerator. I raced the engine to force hot air through the heating system, my breath steaming the windows.

I swung the car around and headed for town. Beckett's technical knowledge could tell him how the device worked, but my background gave me the name of the man who could either build it or name those who could: Clint Brazil. It would be smart to check on him before Homicide did.

He was an old man now, but still young when it came to ideas, specializing in electronics surveillance devices for anyone who had the money to pay. He worked for every law enforcement agency in the city, for all the private investigators and, although no one ever did anything about it, for anyone on the other side of the law who had the price. If Brazil didn't have in stock a bug that would do the job, he'd invent one.

The device that had killed DiMarco was right down his alley.

Driving slowly because of the ice, it took me almost an hour to reach Brazil's street. I turned the corner and slammed on the brakes.

Brazil had a shop on the ground floor where he sold the installation and service of electronic alarm systems which, as thriving as it was, only fronted for his real business.

The street should have been deserted, so the police cruisers and an ambulance parked before the shop at that hour were a surprise. I pulled up and headed for the door. A uniformed man held up a hand. I flashed my badge. "What's it all about?"

"Someone killed the old man who owned the shop," he said. "Sergeant Solkowsky is inside. He can tell you about it."

Solkowsky and I had attended the Police Academy together and

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had once worked out of the same precinct. I found him inside the shop supervising the intern who was supervising the ambulance attendants. Solkowsky was a crew-cut bull of a man whose chief virtue as a detective was his lack of imagination. Solkowsky never guessed; Solkowsky always knew before he moved or he wouldn't move.

The shop he was standing in was small, a plush reception area separated from the rest of the room by a waist-high glass counter. Behind the counter were a pair of desks backed by wall shelves lined with small, brightly colored boxes and beyond them an open door that showed a work area that contained benches, tools and complicated-looking test equipment.

"Can I move him?" asked the intern.

"Can he move him?" Solkowsky asked the photographer.

The photographer nodded.

"You can move him," said Solkowsky. He spotted me. "You stop in to get warm?"

"Just checking on something."

"No lines of communication to where Brazil is now. Someone pressed a .38 to his chest and pulled the trigger twice, about twelve, which is the nearest we can figure it at this point."

"Who found the man?" I asked.

"A patrol car went by the place a couple of times, the boys noticed the light was on and so they stopped to investigate. They found the door open, walked in and found the old man. Otherwise, he would be still lying here growing stiff without nobody knowing nothing."

It was obvious the man for whom Brazil had built the device had returned to keep him from talking—but why not kill Brazil when the device had been delivered?

That was obvious, too. Brazil wasn't to be paid unless the device worked. Instead of money, the old man had collected two slugs.

"You have anything else?" I asked.

"We've just started. Now just what brings you here?"

I drew him aside and explained about DiMarco. Solkowsky raised his chin and scratched his neck thoughtfully. "You know how crazy this sounds?"

"It may sound crazy but it makes sense to me. That's why I want you to seal this place up tight until we establish a connection between the device and the shop. That's why I want you to bear down on this. Whoever killed DiMarco killed Brazil, and

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right now the number one candidate is Weaver."

"You figure on picking up Weaver?"

"That's up to Ross. I'm going to see him now. He'll be in touch. Just concentrate on what you have here. Hell, I don't have to tell you what to do."

"I'll have to check with the captain. Beckett probably called about DiMarco."

"He should let you handle both cases. Tell him Ross will be taking a personal interest."

"Where will you be?"

"In the office later. I'll call you. It's time I wake Ross and tell him what's been going on."

Outside, a gray dawn had arrived to reveal the streets filling with people whose jobs demanded that they get to work early and open the city for business each morning.

Ross lived in a fashionable town house across the street from a park, his three-story brownstone overshadowed by expensive apartment houses and condominiums. I often wondered how he afforded it. The district attorney didn't draw that much salary, but Ross had once had a lucrative practice and his wife came from one of the oldest families in the city.

I slid into the reserved parking spot at the curb, mounted the marble steps and rang the bell.

Ross himself opened the door in his shirt sleeves, no tie and the morning paper in his hand. "I've been expecting you to call," he said. He ushered me into the dining room. "Would you like breakfast?"

I shook my head. My appetite wouldn't be back until this thing was settled. "You'd better sit down," I said. "You're not going to believe what I tell you."

"DiMarco was killed?"

"It isn't only that. It's how he was killed." I went through it all for him while he sipped his coffee.

"How did you find the device?"

"It's hard to slip something by Beckett." I didn't tell him it had been my idea to look inside the car.

"You were fortunate. I would think something like that couldn't be tracked down at all. Where is the device now?"

"Probably at the lab."

"I'll want complete photos and a detailed analysis. To my recollection, nothing like it has ever been used. We shall have a difficult time explaining to a jury if we ever get that far."

"The man who planted it knew that."

"I'll leave everything in your hands," he said. "You'll coordinate

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the investigation with Homicide."

"This may be the break we needed to get Weaver."

He shook his head. "I doubt it. He will have covered his tracks well."

His sudden disinterest in Weaver puzzled me. It was almost as though he had dismissed the killings; as if he expected nothing further to be learned. He might be right. The killings could easily be a dead end. Ross was very good at analyzing that sort of thing very quickly and going on to whatever seemed more important. He lifted his head to say something but the entrance of his wife cut him off.

I stood up.

Harriet Ross, at least fifteen years younger than her husband, was tall and graceful, a natural blonde with fair, glowing skin, slightly slanted dark eyes and an oval face that broke into a thin smile when she saw me. The frilly pink housecoat she was wearing covered her from chin to toe, effectively hiding what I knew was a figure most women envied.

Always pleasant and polite, she nevertheless acted as if it were difficult to admit I existed.

"You are up early, Mr. Cochrane," she said. She made the words sound like a reprimand.

"It isn't a nine-to-five job," I said. I saw no reason to remain. "I'll see you in the office," I said to Ross.

"Just stay with it," he said. "There is no need to tell you how I feel about DiMarco. I want the man who killed him."

"I suppose you'll issue a statement. The newsmen will be at the office early."

He shook his head. "I'll have no comment. What we know we'll keep to ourselves. I'll see that Homicide issues no details."

That's the smart way to handle it, I thought as I walked out into the cold morning, even if it was unusual for Ross. Ordinarily, he would jump on something like the way DiMarco was killed to get more publicity.

There was no one in the office when I arrived. I busied myself for a few moments before dialing Solkowsky.

"Anything develop?" I asked.

"Give us time," he said. "We're just starting to coordinate. Beckett is here and we're expecting you. The heater of the car and the device have been dusted for prints and we've turned up nothing, but the lab fitted the broken pieces of glass together and we lifted a latent. Not good enough for court, but we think we can identify it. Doesn't seem to fit anything in our criminal files so far. We'll

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probably have to send it to the FBI."

"Has the lab tied in the device with anything in Brazil's shop?"

"They're working on it now. It seems that all of the components are common and available anywhere."

"Does the lab have any idea of what was in the vial?"

"Not enough residue. Right now they're sitting there surrounded by all sorts of medical books, trying to figure out what could be used. Do you know how many anesthetics there are?"

"I don't have the faintest idea."

"They tell me dozens. I doubt if they'll come up with anything."

"I'm sure they won't," I said.

I cradled the phone. A print on the vial didn't make sense, not in an operation as clever as this. Someone had made a mistake.

The people who worked in the office began to drift in: the typists, the secretaries, the legal assistants, the other assistant D.A.s; their faces mirroring shock because they had all heard about DiMarco. They gathered in little groups, questioning me, believing that DiMarco had died in an accident. I wasn't going to tell them anything different.

They pressed in on me, their questions rasping my nerves, and the thought uppermost in my mind was that things weren't going well at all. I had to get out of there, to walk alone for a while.

I fled into the bitter wind sweeping across City Hall Plaza just as the clock in the tower sounded with measured beats. It was nine o'clock.

I started across the Plaza in the face of the wind, past the cabstand at the corner.

A horn blew in short, sharp blasts. A cabbie waved at me, swung the door open and came around the front of his cab, walking carefully across the ice at the curb, his thin face frowning.

"I'm glad I run into you, Cochrane," he said. "I'm sorry about DiMarco."

I nodded. One of the reasons for our success had been the help of the Lennie Breckers, the people who saw almost everything that went on in the city but whom no one ever noticed because they blended into the background. Lennie could be depended on for a variety of information he constantly picked up cruising around town.

"I wanted to ask DiMarco if what I told him the other day meant anything, but now I'll never know," he said.

"Suppose you tell me and let me decide."

Lennie cupped his hands and

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breathed into them, rubbing them briskly. "Listen, Cochrane," he said, "let's get in the cab. This cold does my arthritis no good at all."

I climbed into the rear seat. He slid behind the wheel and turned to face me, draping one arm over the back of the seat. Lennie was small and thin, with lenses on his glasses so thick I often wondered how he passed a driver's examination.

"Listen," he said. "About three or four days ago, I picked up a fare in front of the building where Weaver has his contracting offices, one of those muscle men Weaver passes off as businessmen. I know he works for Weaver because I've seen him around and I'm always glad to pick up one of these guys because they tip good. Where do you think he wants to go?"

"I couldn't guess."

"He tells me to take him to the Japanese Pagoda in the park. You know that *nobody* goes there in the winter. I'm surprised, but it's his money. I take him. The only people there are a couple of tourists who don't know no better and a dark-haired broad. She seems to be waiting for my fare. He tells me to wait and walks up to her. They talk for a minute, he hands her an envelope and comes back to the cab. I take him back to town. The woman looks familiar but I just can't place her." He touched his glasses apologetically. "Maybe it's these. Anyway, about an hour later, I'm cruising down Chestnut Street when I see this same broad come out of the bank at Ninth. This time I'm a lot closer and I recognize her. It looks like the D.A.'s wife, except I'm still not a hundred percent sure because I thought she was a blonde. A couple of hours after that, DiMarco flags me down in front of City Hall, so I tell him about it. He tells me not to mention it to anyone, that he'll be back to me. Next thing I know, he's dead."

Lennie's long story boiled down to one thing. What he had seen sounded suspiciously like a payoff.

"You got a funny expression on your face, Cochrane," Lennie said.

Lennie was an unexpected development but a lucky one. I could use what he told me. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Lennie," I said. "We'll check it out now. Suppose you take me to the newspaper office."

It took only a half hour at the photo morgue to find a picture of Harriet Ross sent in for use on the society page. It was a good portrait, with her hair drawn severely back, so that whether she was

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blonde or brunette didn't matter at all.

I showed it to Lennie. "Is this the woman you saw?"

"I would swear to it."

"Okay," I said. "Let's go to the bank."

I had no success with the first few people I checked. They didn't know her and it wasn't until I worked my way into the safe-deposit vault section that I had any luck.

The elderly, fleshy guard named Gordon took one look at the picture. "That's Mrs. Pierce," he said.

"You're sure of the name?"

"Of course, I'm sure. She comes in here often. At least once a month. I can check her card."

"Do that," I said.

The card showed visits shortly after the first of the month for the last six months, the signature *H. Pierce* firm and flowing and definitely feminine.

"I'd like a copy of this card," I told Gordon.

"I'm not sure that's allowed."

"I am, and I want it kept between us. If anyone asks, I was never here."

He waddled over to a copying machine and gave me a copy which I tucked away with the photo.

"This is official business, I suppose," he said.

"You can bet on it," I told him.

Things were moving now the way I wanted them to move. I went back to Lennie's cab which was double-parked and the object of an impatient glare from the traffic cop on the corner.

"What's it all about?" asked Lennie. "The D.A.'s wife . . ."

"Just forget the whole thing, Lennie," I said. "Unless I personally tell you to remember."

"If you say so. Where to now?"

"Police Headquarters."

Lennie dropped me in front of the Headquarters building and I took the elevator to the third-floor fingerprint lab. Humphrey, the man in charge, wasn't too happy to see me.

"I suppose you came about that print," he said.

"You guessed it. Have you identified it yet?"

"It isn't that good and it takes time."

"Suppose I gave you a lead. Would that help?"

"You know it would."

I leaned over his desk and wrote *Ross* on a notepad.

He was just extracting a cigarette from a pack when he saw the name. The pack slipped from his hand as if he had suddenly lost control. "You're kidding."

"Not about something like this."

"It will take a few minutes."

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He rescued his cigarettes and fumbled one out, his hands still not quite steady.

"I'll wait."

"I suppose you know what you're doing."

"I never know," I said. "I only do things and sometimes they turn out right."

I put my feet up on his desk and relaxed, not feeling tired, in spite of having no sleep the night before. Maybe the adrenalin flow was increased as I worked the thing out and got closer to the showdown. I had to admit that things were going well now.

Humphrey came back. "It isn't too clear."

"What does that mean?"

"It means I don't have a perfect print to work with. It could be or it couldn't be. I'm not committing myself."

"It won't hold up in court?"

"Not even with a dumb attorney on the defense."

"It probably will never come to that," I said. "If anyone asks, you never saw me. This is between us unless I tell you otherwise."

"I should tell Solkowsky you were here."

"Why get him all excited? If it works out, I'll tell him myself. In the meantime, earn your salary by going through your print file. Maybe you'll find another that you like better, and that will keep Solkowsky busy."

I left him fumbling for another cigarette. I had found out that the print couldn't be identified and I had started Humphrey thinking about Ross, both of which seemed like good ideas.

On the street, I turned my parka hood up and headed for the municipal garage a block away. The place was as cold as a tomb, my breath steaming in the damp stillness as I walked down the ramp to the official parking places.

Ross' Cadillac was in its reserved slot, the keys in it. I searched the interior perfunctorily and found nothing. I took the keys and opened the trunk.

It had to be there and it was. The box was about eight inches high and six inches square, painted black with a telescoping antenna on top and a dial and some knobs on the front. It looked like an innocent piece of electronics test equipment like those I had seen in Brazil's shop, but I knew this was no tool for a technician. It was the transmitter that had been used to set off the device in DiMarco's car. I closed the trunk lid. It was time now to see Ross.

He was in his office, having just come from the courtroom where he had the Weaver case post-

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poned. He looked up in annoyance. "I don't have time for you now, Jack."

I don't think I ever disliked him more than at that moment. I closed the door and crossed to the window next to him, half sitting on the broad sill, the gray light behind me flooding his face and shadowing mine. He was forced to look up at me, placing him in an awkward position and giving me a definite advantage. "You'll have to take time," I said. "I know who killed DiMarco."

He sat up straighter. "You're certain?"

"A conviction would be no problem."

"Let me decide that. What do you have?"

I handed him the photocopy of the safe-deposit vault record card.

He glanced at it and dropped it on his desk. "What exactly is this?"

"A record of your wife's visit to a safe-deposit box each month after accepting an envelope from one of Weaver's men. She rents the box under her maiden name and wears a dark wig. I'm sure a court order will open the box to find it filled with cash."

His face was blank. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms. "I know nothing of any safe-deposit box."

"There's more," I said. "I also have a print on the vial that was used in the device that killed DiMarco. It could be yours."

"That's impossible," he said coldly.

I pressed on. "I do have the transmitter that was used to set off the device. It's in the trunk of your car. The witness to the accident said the car following DiMarco was dark. Yours is dark brown."

"Just what does all of this mean?"

"It means you sold out to Weaver. Your wife took the payoff. DiMarco found out, so you had to get rid of him. You would have had to get rid of him in any event because he was getting too close to Weaver, and Weaver was paying you to get DiMarco off his back."

"I suppose you can prove I killed Brazil, too."

"There's a .38 in your desk drawer I would like to have checked by ballistics."

He never showed more cool than he did then. "It's all a frame, of course. A good one, but still a frame."

I studied him closely. I hated to admit it, but I was inclined to agree. Ross was no murderer. He could conspire to commit a crime, but he would consider himself

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above executing it. He would leave that to others. "Anything is possible except your wife being seen with Weaver's man," I said. "That was no frame."

"No," he said. "That can't be faked." He looked more concerned than worried.

"All right," I said. "I'll buy the frame. Anyone could have left the transmitter in your car, but you'll have to come up with a good explanation for your wife."

"She's the only one who can do that."

"I could go out there and bring her in, but it would be simpler for you to call and ask her to come here."

"No," he said. "You and I will go talk to her."

I didn't quite see it that way. There was something about being questioned in the D.A.'s office that kept people off balance. Talking to her in her own home put her on familiar ground, put her more at ease.

"All right," I said. "Let's get it over with."

We left by the side door, to avoid reporters who might be waiting in the anteroom, and picked up Ross' car. Neither of us said a word about the device still in the trunk, but I knew he was thinking of it and so was I. I wanted that little box along so I could keep an eye on the thing.

At the house, he led the way, stepping aside as he ushered me into the study.

I took one step and my head exploded. I didn't know what he hit me with, but my legs went out from under me and I went down while the stars that burst suddenly before my eyes faded before they really had a chance to form.

I came to with the rug rough against my face, pain radiating from somewhere in the back of my head. Ross' well-polished shoes, magnified by their closeness, were inches from my face. I rolled over painfully. He was standing above me, my gun in his hand. I blinked at the weird perspective. Ross seemed enormously tall.

"I'm sorry I had to do that," he said.

I sat up slowly, hoping my head wouldn't come loose. From this angle, Ross looked less omnipotent. "So it was no frame," I said thickly. "You really did kill DiMarco."

"No," he said. "I didn't kill DiMarco. Weaver had that done and obviously the Brazil job, too. I have no idea who he hired."

"Where do you fit in?"

"Weaver *has* been paying me for months to take it easy on his operations. I did what I could, but

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I couldn't control DiMarco. Then DiMarco found out about the payoff and came to me. I stalled him. Weaver wanted to kill DiMarco because if he talked, it would be bad for both of us. I balked. Killing DiMarco would cause a great many questions to be asked by the newspapers, perhaps even bring in the state crime commission. Weaver said not to worry about it. No one was supposed to know DiMarco had been murdered, but you and Beckett broke the whole thing open. I didn't expect that when I went through the motions of having you investigate."

"Why would Weaver have the device placed in your car?"

"I can guess at two reasons. My job would be to keep the investigation away from it if necessary. You jumped the gun. It may also be Weaver's subtle way of telling me I am as vulnerable as DiMarco."

I tried to stand.

Ross pushed me down with one hand. "Stay where you are. I feel safer with you on the floor."

"What now?" I asked.

"You're a menace, Cochrane. You have to be eliminated. I called Weaver while you were out and he's sending someone over to do just that."

My head was spinning and not just because he had hit me. It was going around with thoughts of DiMarco and Ross and Weaver and the way DiMarco had died in a high-powered professional killing. Now it was my turn. Power and money . . . I wondered if there were anything Weaver couldn't buy.

What I needed at that moment was some help. "Your wife might walk in," I said, hoping that she would.

"Not likely. Her activities will keep her out all day. I knew that when I suggested coming here."

"If I turn up dead, you'll have a great deal of talking to do."

"You're a man with many enemies. I think I can cover up quite satisfactorily since I can steer the investigation."

There was no doubt of that. My trouble was my own fault. Instead of going to Solkowsky, I'd gone directly to Ross, trying to do it all myself, trying to be a hero. Now I had no one to back me up. The people who devised departmental procedures were no fools, and I had been around long enough to know there was a reason for everything—particularly for not working alone. I was on my own and I had to do something before Weaver's men got there.

Mrs. Ross had decorated the house in excellent taste, her preference running to highly polished

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floors with small braided rugs protecting the high traffic areas. Ross was standing on one of those rugs now.

Without thinking, without wanting to think, I thrust out a hand, grabbed a handful of rug and jerked hard.

Ross didn't go down—that sort of thing happens only in films—but he did totter off balance long enough for the gun to waver. I threw myself at his legs and he went over, the gun going off above me. Aching head and all, I handled him easily from that point, almost breaking his fingers as I tore the gun away from him and struggled to my feet.

I leaned against the wall weakly, my head pounding, staring down at him. He wasn't looking at me. The quick struggle had taken us out into the hall and his eyes were fixed on the front door behind me.

The chill that went down my spine didn't come entirely from the cold draft.

A voice said, "Drop it, Cochrane."

I let the gun slip to the floor.

"Into the room," the voice said.

I stepped into the study.

"You, too," the voice said to Ross.

Ross' lips narrowed in surprise but he rose to his feet and followed me without saying a word.

I turned and studied the two men who came into the room. They were typical Weaver men, molded in crime's new image. Well-dressed, carrying attaché cases, they looked more like aggressive young businessmen than hoods until you examined the faces closely and realized that few young businessmen came equipped with that flat, dead look.

"Take him out and get it done," Ross said.

One of the men was wearing a heavy, fur-collared tan coat; the other a well-fitted dark-blue cashmere. The one in the fur collar held my gun, the other a silenced pistol.

The one in the cashmere coat said, "Shut up," to Ross.

"Don't talk like that to me," snapped Ross. "Weaver wouldn't like it."

The man grinned coldly. "Weaver doesn't give a damn. You're through. He said to tell you that you've become more trouble than you're worth." He jerked a thumb at me. "Cochrane isn't the only one who gets it. So do you. Weaver figures this is too good an opportunity to miss. We make it look like you and Cochrane had a little disagreement and shot each other. It will be quite a puzzle for the crime boys to work

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on. Should keep them busy all winter."

Ross stood stunned. I measured the man in the fur collar, wondering how far I could get before he gunned me down, thinking that I wasn't going to stand there and take it.

Ross forced the issue. It had taken a great deal of raw guts to get to where he was, and he had counted on that courage to take him even further to the governor's chair and perhaps to the U.S. Senate. No one was going to take that away without a fight.

He stepped forward, jaw thrust out, fist doubled, swinging at the man in the cashmere coat.

Cashmere Coat had no choice. He shot him before Ross' fist was halfway around, the sound of soft popping, Ross' coat jumping a little as the slug hit.

It distracted the other man long enough for me to make my move. I was a little more scientific than Ross. With one hand I grabbed the gun, chopping down on his forearm with the other.

The gun came loose in my hand just as Cashmere Coat turned and fired at me. The slug tore through my left arm but I had my gun pointed by then, its weight and balance welcome and familiar. I squeezed the trigger.

The cashmere fabric jumped a little just as Ross' had. He went down.

Before I could recover, Fur Collar fled down the hall and out into the street, not taking time to close the door.

I sank into a chair as the bitter cold filled the room, driving out the pungent smell of cordite. Ross and the man in the cashmere coat had fallen close to each other like long-lost brothers embracing in death.

I looked at Ross. He had died well. Somehow the fact that he had been corrupted by Weaver no longer seemed important. If he hadn't moved toward that gun, I would probably be dead and I owed him something for that, even if he hadn't really done it for me. One thing I could do was preserve the thing he had valued above anything else. His reputation. There was no point in making him look bad, not now.

I would say nothing about the money in the safe-deposit box. If I knew Mrs. Ross, she would be far from willing to testify as to its source. Let her have it. She could snuggle up to it these cold winter nights in place of her husband.

I would turn the transmitter over to Solkowsky, telling him Ross himself had discovered it in his car. The unimaginative Solkowsky would accept the implica-

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tion of a frame without too many questions. It was something he could easily understand.

The transmitter would lead us nowhere, except to go down in the books as a bizarre new way to commit murder and make life a little more difficult for every investigating officer in the country.

For the time being, Weaver would get away with DiMarco's murder and with that of Brazil and of Ross. It was simply too difficult to connect him with any of them.

Right now I needed a story to cover Ross' death. I put my head down between my knees and tried to think above the pain now flooding from my bleeding arm.

ASSASSIN KILLS D.A.
AND WOUNDS AIDE

The words came from nowhere and sounded good. I would say that the gunman had burst into Ross' home while he and I were having a conference and shot us both before I killed him. There would be a great many questions, but I would hold them off until I could think more clearly.

I sighed, heaved myself to my feet and wove my way to the phone.

Intrigue. Conspiracy. Corruption. That was the city and Ross had been part of it and it had killed him.

Beckett had said there were an awful lot of ways to kill a man. There were also a great many roads a man could take toward death.

Someone as smart as Ross should have thought of that before he made his deal with Weaver.



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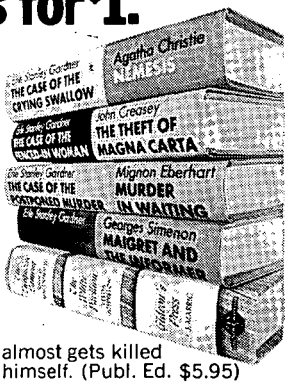
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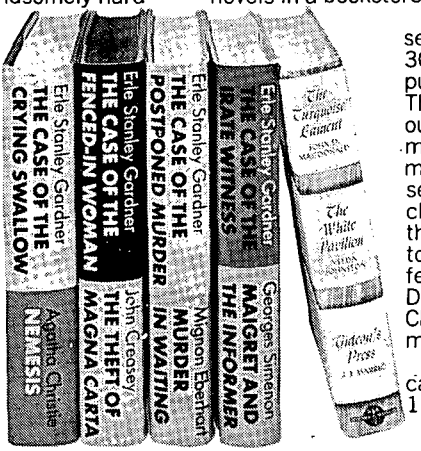
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